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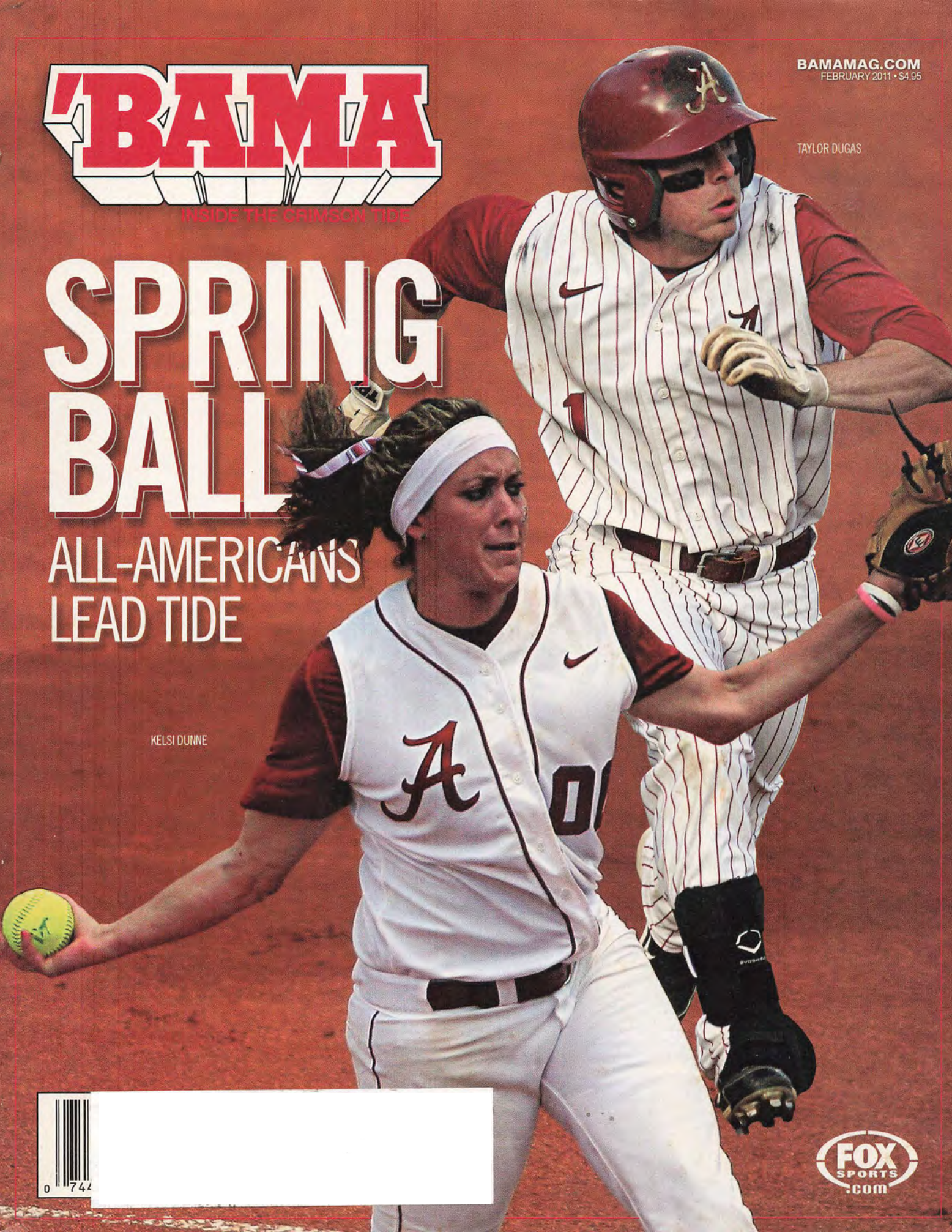

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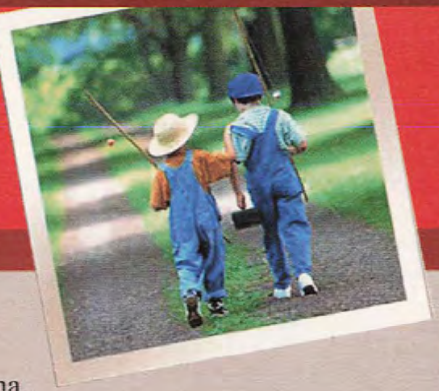

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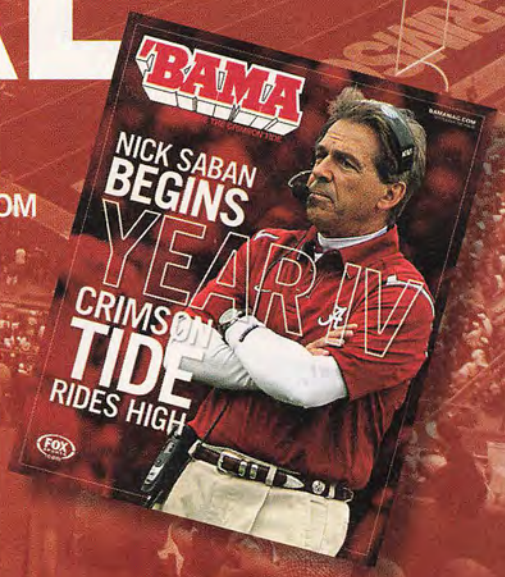

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR FELLOW CRIMSON TIDE FAN,

As spring approaches, most Alabama fans aren't thinking about baseball. Not unless some top football player is going to miss spring practice to be a part of the baseball team. Not including A-Day, though, the top spectator sports at The University in the spring are baseball and softball. Both Alabama baseball and Alabama softball have strong traditions.

Baseball had a dramatic finish last year, a furious finish in Southeastern Conference play to make it into the SEC Tournament, then coming within a game – one swing of the bat, in fact – of making it to the College World Series in Omaha.

Softball, too, had a very successful year, the first Crimson Tide softball team to win both the conference regular season and SEC Tournament championships. Not making it to the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City was disappointing.

Both teams have reasons for optimism as the 2011 season approaches.

For the baseball team under second year coach Mitch Gaspard, the Crimson Tide expects carry-over from its outstanding play at the end of the season. As Gaspard pointed out, Bama was one of the hottest teams in the nation.

Patrick Murphy has built a dynasty as softball has moved from a West Coast game to nationwide. If you don't have tickets, you may have to settle for standing room for the big games. Softball joins football as having to hang out the "Sold Out" sign every pre-season.

There will be other things going on at The Capstone this spring. For one thing, the winter sports will be winding down with men's and women's basketball teams hoping for post-season play and gymnastics looking for a national championship.

Nick Saban's football team will go on public display in mid-April.

And men and women participate in the other sports of spring – golf, tennis, track and field.

It's the unfortunate nature of the college calendar that baseball and softball have to start and end too soon. No boys (and girls) of summer these. It won't feel like the season for a few weeks. But once the temperature rises, there is nothing like a warm afternoon or evening, the cry of "Play ball!," the crack – well, pling! – of the bat, and the leisurely enjoyment of America's Pastime.

It begins in mid-February. Bundle up.

Sincerely,

Kirk McNair

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'BAMA

INSIDE THE CRIMSON TIDE

FEBRUARY 2011 • ISSUE SIX

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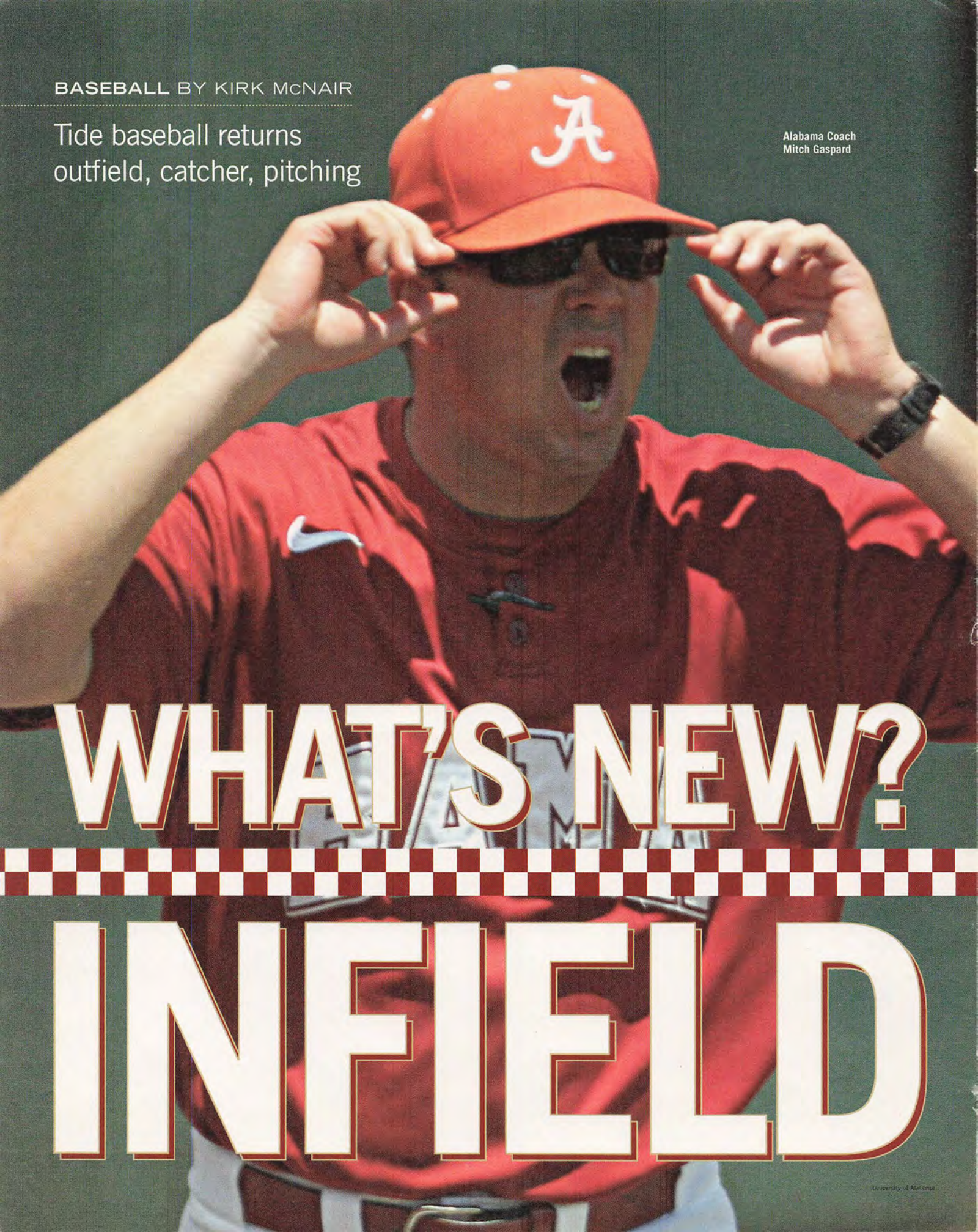
Kevin C. Cox/Getty

BASEBALL BY KIRK McNAIR

Tide baseball returns outfield, catcher, pitching



Alabama Coach Mitch Gaspard

WHAT'S NEW? INFIELD

University of Alabama

Last year Alabama started strong and finished strong, but was so-so in the middle. Alabama won 16 of its first 17 games and 13 of its last 17 in 2010.

In fact, Bama almost didn't make the SEC Tournament. In order to play for the league championship, Alabama had to win two of three games against Ole Miss and sweep Tennessee in the final two series.

In the SEC Tournament, Alabama won three straight games and made it to the finals. Bama was selected for the NCAA Tournament for the 21st time. The Tide won the regional by defeating NCAA No. 8 seed Georgia Tech in Atlanta, and Bama came within one pitch of defeating Clemson at Clemson for the opportunity to go to the College World Series.

But in the world of college athletics, that was the 2010 team and this is the 2011 team.

Second year Coach Mitch Gaspard led Alabama to a 42-25 record and top 20 ranking in his first season replacing Jim Wells. The Tide was 15-15 in SEC play.

Gaspard said, "Last year I think we touched every emotion possible in roughly a 65-game season. We started out 16-1, then went about 5-15 in our next 20, and we were up against the wall and had to win two of three from Ole Miss and sweep Tennessee just to get into the SEC Tournament. We really caught fire in the back end of the season and played a lot like we did in the front end of the season and obviously had a tremendous finish and we were one swing away from going to Omaha.

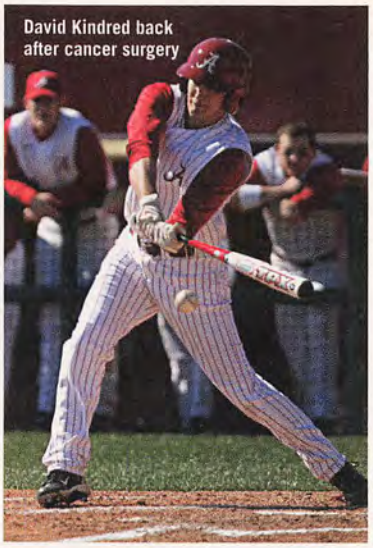
"It was a good season. People remember how you finish, and that made it nice, but there were a lot of ups and downs to get to that finish.

"There's nothing like being a head coach at Alabama and playing in the SEC. You have to stay the course and stay consistent and trust in your beliefs and in your plan, and when you go 5-15 that can be tested. But I thought our coaching staff and players did a good job of staying with the plan and we played our best baseball at the back end of the season, and that's what you want. We were one of the hottest teams in the country at the end of the season, and I think that's important going into this year. Not only from a players standpoint and team standpoint, but I thought we had really good energy in our fan base at the end of the season and we need to do a good job of building on that this year.

"Our motto is 'Play hard, get dirty.' We want our guys to play with a lot of emotion. When you play 56 scheduled games, it takes a lot of team play and you know there are going to be breakdowns, but we are trying to get to a consistency game-in and game-out. That's what we preach every day–consistent, hard-nosed baseball."

There will be some familiar faces in the Alabama lineup this year, but there will also be a number of newcomers in key positions. Most notably, Alabama must replace its entire infield save catcher.

Gaspard said, "Our entire infield was lost to graduation and the professional draft. The bad is you lose them all, but the good news is all four were drafted and played well in professional baseball – Jake Smith, Josh Rutledge, Ross Wilson, and Clay Jones.


David Kindred back after cancer surgery

University of Alabama

"Our number one concern and our number one challenge is building a good corps back in that infield, and you are building it with either freshmen or guys who haven't been out there as starters. Through the fall I think we certainly made some strides in that area, but it's been a work in progress and we've had some growing pains.

"I think as the dust settles we'll have a pretty fine infield."

One of two big freshmen, Patrick McGavin (6-3, 210) or Austen Smith (6-4, 230) will be at first base, where Clay Jones had a .313 batting average and 17 home runs, 14 doubles last year.

Gaspard said he is excited about both players. McGavin was the 6A player of the year as he led Spanish Fort to the state championship. Smith was drafted by the Mets.

The coach said, "Both guys for being big giuys are very athletic, run well, and have really bright futures. I think both will be tremendous players here. It's important to get both those guys a lot of at-bats. Both potentially can hit in the middle of the line-up for us down the road." He said both might have time as designated hitters.

For the past three years, Alabama has had all-star players at third base (Jake Smith), shortstop (Josh Rutledge), and second base (Ross Wilson).

This year Bama will move Brett Booth, a former catcher and outfielder, to third base. He worked there all fall and Gaspard feels he will be adequate. Booth is backed by James Tullidge.

"Brett played a lot for us last year and played really well down the stretch," Gaspard said. "He hit about .350 in post-season play.

"He has all the tools to be a good third baseman for us. He is tough mentally. It's not like watching Jake Smith over there making every play like a big leaguer, but he makes plays."

Gaspard concluded, "We feel like those corner spots (first base and third base) are going to be okay."

The coach said, "Up the middle, we had really been comfortable with Rutledge and Wilson in the line-up every day for three years."

Gaspard said Jared Reaves, a transfer from Southern Union Junior College, would be at shortstop. Reaves led the state junior college players in hitting as a freshman "and was right up there again last year," Gaspard said. "He's a really good offensive player who we think will be a consistent player for us making routine plays."

Josh Sanders transferred to Alabama two years ago from Jacksonville State. He had to sit out last season and is now a senior. He is listed as number one at second base. "He is a good baseball player and a really good defensive player," Gaspard said. "He is heady, plays with good awareness."

He said both middle infielders will be backed by freshman Kevin Gifford.

With all three starters returning, the outfield is a

Brock Bennett is solid behind the plate for Tide

strength for the Tide, particularly with All-America Taylor Dugas in center field. Last year Dugas batted .395, was walked 59 times, and hit by pitch 11 times for an on-base percentage of .525. He scored 70 runs.

He'll be flanked by returning left fielder Jon Kelton and right fielder Andrew Miller.

Last year Kelton batted .286. In the field he played errorless baseball and had seven assists. Miller batted .247.

Gaspard said that sophomore Brandt Hendricks (.250 batting average in 26 games) and freshman Jeremiah Tullidge performed well in the fall. "We have some depth out there that we can move around and play with, and I'm very comfortable with out outfield play," he said.

One of the best stories of Alabama baseball is that David Kindred will return as a designated hitter prospect. Kindred batted .314 last year, then missed the post season when he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. While Bama played in the NCAA Tournament, Kindred had surgery. He is now cancer free and expected to play this spring.

"David was having a terrific year last year and then was diagnosed with cancer," Gaspard said. "He should be fully recovered by the start of the season. He worked the majority of the fall with us and was limited a little bit, but it looks like he's going to be healthy and ready to go."

Kindred batted .314 and had a .500 slugging percentage last year.

Josh Rosecrans, who was a junior college All-America at Grayson in Texas last year, may also be used as a designated hitter.

"That spot should be taken care of well," Gaspard said.

In baseball at all levels, it is pitching, and Bama returns two of its weekend starters. Jimmy Nelson and his 9-3 record are gone, but the Tide returns Nathan Kilcrease (8-3 with 2.85 earned run average, 82 strikeouts and 21 bases on balls) and Adam Morgan (7-5).

Gaspard said, "We've got the core of the weekend rotation back with Nathan Kilcrease. He was our do-it-all guy last year, starting out in the bull pen and then when we made our run late in the season he became one of our top starters and he'll be a starter to begin with this year. He'll be matched up with Adam Morgan, who was our Friday night starter for most of last year. We really liked what we saw out of Adam this fall, which was being very consistent. I think those two guys will be the leaders of our pitching staff."

Tucker Hawley has some starting experience and was good down the stretch as a freshman in 2010 and could get a weekend starting job. Sophomore Taylor Wolfe (3-2) got the start in some key post season games last year. Gaspard said, "Taylor started the (NCAA) game against Georgia Tech and the game against LSU in the SEC Tournament last year, so he got valuable experience and he pitched well in the fall."

As for other pitching candidates, Gaspard said, "A freshman, Cary Baxter, was very impressive all fall and I think he's a young guy who is going to be able to step in in some role and really make an impact as a freshman.

"A couple of guys from last year who really made strides: sophomore Trey Pilkington was very good all fall and we're expecting big things out of him. In the back end of the bullpen, either set up or closing, you have Jay Shaw, a freshman; Jason Zylstra, a hard-throwing right-hander who can get up in the mid-90s; and Nathan Kennedy, a submarine pitcher from the same junior college as Rosecrans, I think is going to have an opportunity to pitch some big innings for us.

"And we also have Brett Whitaker back, who had some good innings for us in relief. Adam Windsor is sort of a situational left-hander."

Most weeks Alabama will have five games, so Gaspard is looking for a minimum of five starters and five relievers. "For the most part, 10 pitchers will get you where you need to be. By game 30, you probably

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Nathan Kilcrease returns as key Tide pitcher

have a pretty good idea of those guys," Gaspard said. "But things can change quickly in college baseball."

Those pitchers will be throwing to a player Gaspard considers one of the best. "Brock Bennett had just another super fall," Gaspard said. "He's going to be asked to do what he did last year, which I really think he is as good a catch-and-throw guy as there is in the conference. He hit close to .300 for us last year (.283). He's just a solid, solid player behind the plate and we're expecting a big year out of him.

"We have a quality back-up in Ladson Montgomery, a player out of Florida who was on Team USA and is going to be a good young player for us. He should get a lot out of backing up Brock this year."

In the SEC, teams play series against all but one other team. Last year and this year Bama does not play Georgia. Last year the Bulldogs had one of the weakest teams they have had, which was a bit of bad schedule luck for the Tide. But Gaspard said the league is so strong that every game is a challenge.

"Typically, seven or eight (SEC) teams are going to be ranked in the top 25. The SEC is going to have more players drafted than any other conference. Every time you play it takes a high level of skill and concentration to be successful in this league."

The Tide coach said, "Typically, the West is the strongest, but this year the East appears the strongest. Florida may be the number one team in the country. Vanderbilt has its team back and South Carolina is the defending national champion and has most of its team back, although they lost some pitching. A lot of teams in the West lost a lot of good players." ■

2011 ALABAMA BASEBALL ROSTER

No	Name	B-T	Ht/Wt	Pos	Class	Hometown
16	Cary Baxter	R-R	6-3/185	P-OF	Fr	Birmingham
41	Brock Bennett	R-R	5-10/165	C	Sr	Tucker, Ga.
5	Brett Booth	R-R	5-10/190	3B	So	Northport
1	Taylor Dugas	L-L	5-7/165	OF	Jr	Lafayette, La.
42	Allen Dye	R-R	6-0/170	Inf	Fr	Vestavia Hills
31	Kevin Gifford	R-R	5-8/180	Inf-P	Fr	Warner-Robins, Ga.
46	Hunter Gregory	L-R	5-11/190	OF	Jr	Northport
44	Tucker Hawley	R-R	6-2/210	P	So	Aiken,S.C.
12	Brandt Hendricks	R-R	6-1/205	OF	So	Jay, Fla.
10	Jon Kelton	L-R	6-0/185	OF-Inf	Jr	LaGrange, Ga.
22	Nathan Kennedy	R-R	6-1/205	P	Jr	Guelph, Ont.
28	Nathan Kilcrease	R-R	5-6/160	P	Sr	Phenix City
13	David Kindred	L-R	6-0/195	OF	Sr	Tuscaloosa
38	Justin Luther	R-R	6-3/195	P	Fr	Dallas, Texas
20	Patrick McGavin	L-L	6-3/20-5	1B/P	Fr	Spanish Fort
2	Andrew Miller	L-L	6-1/190	OF	So	Citronelle
23	Ladson Montgomery	L-R	5-9/180	C	Fr	Jacksonville, Fla.
32	Adam Morgan	L-L	6-1/180	P	Jr	Marietta, Ga.
24	Case Nixon	R-R	6-1/210	C-P	Fr	Tuscaloosa
11	Trey Pilkington	R-R	6-2/205	P	So	Anniston
9	Jared Reaves	R-R	5-10/180	SS	Jr	Eastman, Ga.
6	Josh Rosecrans	R-R	6-4/210	C	Jr	Edmond, Okla.
35	Josh Sanders	R-R	6-0/160	2B	Sr	Montgomery
17	Jay Shaw	R-R	5-11/190	P	Fr	Pinson
26	Jonathan Smart	L-L	6-0/170	P	Sr	Tuscaloosa
34	John Davis Smelser	R-R	5-11/170	Inf/OF	Jr	Tuscaloosa
18	Austen Smith	R-R	6-4/230	1B	Fr	Cantonment, Fla.
29	Charlie Sullivan	R-R	6-1/180	P	So	Oxford, Miss.
36	Troy Sutherland	R-R	6-3/245	P	So	Madison
14	Christian Talley	R-R	6-4/190	P	Fr	Diamondhead, Miss.
39	James Tullidge	R-R	6-3/185	3B	Jr	Tuscaloosa
40	Jeremiah Tullidge	L-L	6-0/170	OF	Fr	Tuscaloosa
37	Charley Waldrep	R-R	5-9/180	C	Fr	Celina, Texas
7	Brett Whitaker	R-R	6-1/190	P-1B	Sr	Tuscaloosa
21	Adam Windsor	L-L	5-10/180	P	So	Pinson
27	Taylor Wolfe	L-L	6-0/170	P	So	Fortson, Ga.
33	Jason Zylstra	R-R	6-4/220	P	Jr	Sylacauga

HEAD COACH: Mitch Gaspard
HITTING COACH: Dax Norris
VOLUNTEER ASSISTANT: Bobby Barbier

FLORIDA FAVORED

SCOUT PUBLISHERS PICK GATORS FOR SEC TITLE

It was South Carolina in 2010 and LSU in 2009. If the publishers of Scout Media affiliated magazines and Internet sites are correct, Florida will carry the banner of the Southeastern Conference as the league attempts to produce a third consecutive champion of the College World Series.

Florida wasn't a runaway choice to win the SEC Eastern Division, but had more first place votes than South Carolina. Florida and South Carolina were the only teams picked to win the overall championship.

LSU was a close winner over Ole Miss to take the Western Division championship in 2011.

In the East, there were clear distinctions. Between them, Florida and South Carolina got every first place vote, and the Gators and Gamecocks consistently were followed in the balloting by Vanderbilt. Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee were grouped closely at the bottom of the division.

It was not so easy for the writers to pick the Western Division. Five teams–all but Mississippi State–received first place votes. Alabama was voted all the way from first to worst.

The final predictions were:

East–1. Florida, 2. South Carolina, 3. Vanderbilt, 4. Georgia, 5. Kentucky, 6. Tennessee.

West–1. LSU, 2. Ole Miss, 3. Arkansas, 4. (tie) Alabama and Auburn, 6. Mississippi State.

WESTERN DIVISION

(Alabama outlook by Kirk McNair covered elsewhere in this issue)

ARKANSAS

by Matt Jones, Hawgs Illustrated

Dave Van Horn loves a good challenge and the ninth-year Arkansas head coach has one this season.

The Razorbacks must replace 17 departed players from a year ago, including a first-round selection (Zack Cox), two second-round selections (Brett Eibner and Drew Smyly), and a fifth-rounder (Andy Wilkins) in the MLB Draft. The group helped Arkansas win a combined 84 games the last two seasons–the most during a two-year span in school history–and advance to two NCAA Super Regionals and the College World Series in 2009.

While an abundance of talent is gone, Arkansas returns several starters from last season and welcomes a top 10 recruiting class to campus, according to Baseball America.

The team's unquestioned leader is catcher James McCann, who earned captain status as a sophomore last year. The Santa Barbara, Calif., native is a third-year starter at the position and Van Horn believes he is one of the best defensive catchers in the country.

Arkansas is also strong in its middle infield. Bo Bigham, a junior, returns for his third season as the starter at second base, while redshirt junior Tim Carver begins his second season as the team's starting shortstop.

Matt Reynolds, who split time with Carver at shortstop last season, will have the tall task of replacing Cox at third base. The sophomore should be ready for the challenge after gaining 25 pounds over the off-season and healing from a shin injury that forced him to miss considerable playing time a year ago.

There is no clear-cut favorite for the team's starting first baseman. Van Horn said he was happy with freshman Dominic Ficociello's defense there in the fall and the offense of senior Kyle Robinson and junior college transfer Sam Bates. Jarrod McKinney, an outfielder who tore his ACL a year ago, practiced at first base during the fall and could see playing time there in the spring.

In the outfield, redshirt junior Collin Kuhn turned down a 15th-round offer by the Detroit Tigers to return to school. Kuhn had a breakout season last year, with 16 home runs and 52 RBI, and earned most valuable player honors at the NCAA Fayetteville Regional. Kuhn will replace Eibner in center field.

Jacob Morris, a transfer from Arizona State, is one of the team's fastest runners and should be in the mix to start at one of the two corner outfield positions. McKinney, Matt Vinson, Franco Broyles, and Kyle Atkins are all possibilities to start in the outfield.

On the mound, Arkansas is minus all three starting weekend pitchers from the end of last season - Smyly, Mike Bolsinger and T.J. Forrest.

D.J. Baxendale will likely be the Friday night starter when the season begins. The sophomore was a part-time starter last season, while also earning seven saves out of the bullpen. He pitched 5 1/3 innings of scoreless relief in Game 2 of the Tempe Super Regional last June.

Van Horn has been happy with the progression of left-hander Geoffrey Davenport, who could start opening weekend. Left-handers Randall Fant and Cade Lynch, and right-handed freshman Brandon Moore are all possibilities to start on the mound.

Ryne Stanek, a third-round selection in last summer's draft, could figure into the starting lineup or could become the team's second freshman closer in as many seasons.

AUBURN

by Matt Jones, Hawgs Illustrated

While football might be king, baseball is holding its own at Auburn.

Momentum is strong on the plains following one of the best seasons in school history in 2010. Auburn won its first SEC West title in 15 years, made the SEC Tournament for the first time since 2003, and hosted the fourth regional in school history.

The Tigers had a school-record nine players taken in the first 30 rounds of the MLB Draft last summer, including fourth-round picks Hunter Morris and Trent Mummey.

Third-year Tigers coach John Pawlowski was rewarded for the improvement with a contract extension through 2015 and he doesn't expect things to slow down this year.

"We lost a large number of our offense last year with guys like Brian Fletcher, Hunter Morris, Ryan Jenkins and Trent Mummey, but that's the nature of what we do," Pawlowski said. "In order for us to be successful the other guys will have to step up. We'll have some new faces in the line-up and some guys returning that we think can be an impact."

While a good chunk of the offense is gone, the Tigers still return seven position players who started at least 33 games a season ago.

The infield is especially strong with the return of catcher Tony Caldwell, first baseman Kevin Patterson, second baseman Casey McElroy and third baseman Dan Gamache. The quartet combined to hit 43 of the team's NCAA-leading 131 home runs last season and added 154 RBIs.

Preston Tucker among many Florida stars

Rebels' Jake Morgan
back from arm surgery

Freshman Tyler Dial could push Gamache for playing time at third, while fellow freshman Zach Alvord is a candidate to play either of the two middle infield positions.

In the outfield, Justin Fradejas is one of the team's leaders. The senior had three home runs and 33 RBIs last season and is expected to start in center field. Creede Simpson (5 HRs, 31 RBIs) will start in right field.

"I think there are enough returning players and you have to have some experience coming back because this league is so tough," Pawlowski said. "I think we've got some."

Senior utility man Justin Bryant and freshman Jay Gonzalez will compete for the starting spot in left.

On the mound, the Tigers lost a pair of weekend starters in Cole Nelson and Grant Dayton, but return left-hander Cory Luckie. The junior started 18 games a year ago, going 6-4 with a 5.91 earned run average.

"He ate up some innings for us last year," Pawlowski said. "He just knows how to pitch.

Slade Smith, a sophomore right-hander, will also likely figure into the starting rotation. Smith started six games last season, going 4-0 with a 4.65 ERA.

A pair of junior college transfer right-handers could round out the rotation. Andrew Morris (Gulf Coast Community College) and Will Irvin (Itawamba Community College) each have great credentials, Pawlowski said.

Finding a replacement for departed closer Austin Hubbard (10 saves) will be key. Ethan Wallen, Bradley Hendrix and Justin Bryant are all candidates out of the bullpen.

LSU

by Hunt Palmer, TigerSportsDigest.com

The names that carried Coach Paul Mainieri's LSU Tigers to a pair of College World Series births and a National Championship are largely gone. The 2011 season begins without Blake Dean, Micah Gibbs, Leon Landry, Paul Bertuccini, and Anthony Ranaudo.

Junior centerfielder Mikie Mahtook returns as the Tigers top position player. Mahtook is a five-tool player who projects as a high-round draft pick after the 2011 season. He batted .335 a season ago and belted 14 home runs, second most on the team. He also stole 22 bases to lead the Tigers.

Also returning to the outfield is senior left fielder Trey Watkins. Watkins batted leadoff for the Tigers for the first 25 games of the 2010 season before dislocating his elbow diving for a fly ball. He returned late in the season and hit the game-winning double with two outs in the ninth inning to lift the Tigers over UC-Irvine in Game 1 of the Regional. The speedy Watkins will bat leadoff.

The right field spot was up for grabs going into the spring. The likely candidate to nab the job is junior college transfer Raph Rhymes. Rhymes was the 2010 Division II National Player of the Year at LSU-Eunice. He batted an eye-popping .483 with 12 home runs and 98 runs batted in. Sophomore Mason Katz is also in the running. Katz started eight games in 2010 and batted .314.

The odd man out in right field will get the first look at designated hitter.

In the infield, it starts up the middle.

Shortstop Austin Nola and second baseman Tyler Hanover return to form one of the better combinations in the SEC, both at the plate and in the field. Both players started every game for LSU in 2010, and the juniors will be called upon to anchor an infield that will be breaking in new corner infielders for the second year in a row.

Newcomer JaCoby Jones is expected to step in at third base, a position that plagued LSU the majority of 2010. LSU tried Wet Delatte, Beau Didier, Grant Dozar, and ultimately settled on Alex Edward at third base last year. Jones, the all-time hits leader in Mississippi high school history, was a 19th round selection of the Astros. He's 6-foot-3 and weighs 200 pounds. He's a phenomenal athlete with gap-to-gap power. Jones will be asked to hit in the middle of order and solidify a position that was a problem last season.

At first base, Edward will make the move across the diamond. As a freshman, Edward became a starter in the latter half of the year. He started 23 games and hit .314 with a pair of home runs, one of which came in regional play.

Possibly the biggest hole Mainieri must fill is behind the plate. Micah Gibbs, a three-year starter, was the team's most valuable player in 2010. The switch hitting catcher batted over .400 most of the season and finished at a robust .388 with 10 long balls.

Freshman Tyler Ross enters the spring as the starting catcher. Ross is 6-foot-3 and weighs 220 pounds. He's got a compact swing and can hit to all fields. The youngster impressed the coaches in the fall and has all of the tools to be the next great Tiger backstop.

Mainieri's biggest concern is on the mound. Ace Anthony Ranaudo injured himself in his first start and never returned to form last season. The Red Sox took the tall righty with the 39th pick in the 2010 draft. Incoming freshman Zach Lee arrived on campus but bolted for the professional ranks at the last minute, leaving Mainieri with a vacancy atop his rotation.

To add injury to insult, left-hander Jordan Rittiner and right-hander Joey Bourgeois underwent Tommy John surgery and will miss the 2011 season. Chris Matulis and Mitch Mormann left the program, leaving Mainieri with a lack of arms at his disposal.

Freshman Kevin Gausman is the jewel of the nation's No. 2 signing class according to Baseball America. The tall righty was the Dodgers 6th round selection. He'll join junior college transfer Tyler Jones (21st round White Sox) as the new faces in the projected weekend rotation. Both have fastballs that can reach 92-94 miles per hour. Senior Ben Alsup is in line to be the third weekend arm. Alsup threw the ball exceptionally well at the end of last season. He's not overpowering, but the right hander changes speeds well and has a calm demeanor on the hill.

Matty Ott returns as the closer after a disappointing sophomore campaign given the impact his first year out of high school – when he saved a school record 16 games, striking out 69 against only six walks. Last season his ERA ballooned to 6.38. If LSU's bullpen is going to hold up this season, Ott will need a return to form.

OLE MISS

by Jeff Roberson, Ole Miss Spirit

Since Mike Bianco became head coach in 2001, Ole Miss has participated in nine NCAA Regionals, hosting five, and advanced to four Super Regionals, hosting three.

The 2010 Rebels were an NCAA Tournament team and played in the Charlottesville Regional but failed to advance. As for 2011, Bianco said he likes what he sees throughout the squad.

"As far as pitching goes, the guys we thought needed to pitch well did," he said of the fall practice sessions. "Offensively it's a little harder to judge with the new bat, and one of our best hitters was not out there this fall, Matt Snyder (recovering from shoulder surgery). I like this club offensively. We don't necessarily have tremendous depth, but we have more depth than last year."

One of the reasons for the improved depth was the addition of new players. With the transfers and the freshmen, there are more new guys than old ones. Some 18 veterans welcomed 20 newcomers. The roster has to be 35 by first pitch in mid-February.

For starters, Bianco liked what he saw on the mound. The Rebels don't return an "ace" of the staff, which is unusual for a program that has done so the past several seasons.

"When you return a Drew Pomeranz (drafted in June as the 5th overall player by the Indians), there's that comfort of knowing, 'Hey I've got that guy on Friday,'" Bianco said. "This year, that isn't the case.

"We return Jake Morgan who is a year removed from arm surgery. We return Brett Huber. Then we return some guys who didn't have their best years last spring, like David Goforth and Matt Tracy and Trent Rothlin. All of them pitched much better (in the fall) than they pitched last fall or last spring."

Statistically Matt Crouse led the way. The junior left-hander posted impressive numbers, with a 0.95 ERA in 19 innings pitched, allowing just two runs on nine hits with 25 strikeouts and only two walks.

"Matt Crouse probably had the best fall of anybody, one of those where every time you looked up, he was just getting them all out," Bianco said.

"R.J. Hively and Austin Wright pitched really well throughout

the fall," he said of the two juco pitchers. "Austin was one of the top pitchers. I think he's got a shot to be one of those three (weekend) guys. Same with R.J. He commands the zone. He's got great stuff, the ball moves all over. None of his balls are straight. His fast ball cuts and sinks. He's got an excellent slider and a changeup. He's a seasoned guy who pitched at Cal State-Fullerton and then in junior college. I think he really understands the game."

Two freshmen pitchers, Mike Mayers and Bobby Wahl, were among the fall's best as well.

Ole Miss entered the fall looking for a third baseman. The likely frontrunner to replace Zach Miller is freshman Preston Overbey. But there are four players in the mix at third, shortstop, and second.

"Preston Overbey, (freshman) Austin Anderson, (junior) Blake Newalu, and (returning sophomore) Alex Yarbrough are there," Bianco said. "Defensively (freshman) Gabe Woods has to play better and he realizes that. He had a good fall offensively, but defensively he has to be a little stronger."

At first base, Snyder, a junior, could return. He is recovering from shoulder surgery in June, causing him to miss fall practice.

"Matt (Snyder) has to come back and play and be able to handle things defensively. (Senior) Miles Hamblin can play first. (Freshman) Will Allen can play first and also had a great fall behind the plate and offensively. (Senior) Matt Smith can also play first. So depending on the outfield situation, we'll see."

Bianco said three solid catchers are vying for playing time.

"There's great competition among three catchers with (junior) Taylor Hightower, Hamblin, and Allen competing behind the plate," he said.

In the outfield, sophomore Tanner Mathis led the team in hitting in fall ball with a .420 batting average. Returning seniors Matt Smith and Jordan King, along with junior college transfer Zach Kirksey, are among the outfield candidates.

MISSISSIPPI STATE

by Gene Swindoll, GenesPage.com

Mississippi State baseball appears to be on the rise again after a three-season slump that has seen the Bulldogs have three losing seasons in a row.

With two outstanding recruiting classes during the past two years, third-year Coach John Cohen should see the fruits of labor beginning with the 2011 season.

A strength of the team should be the pitching staff, which will be led by a sophomore and junior. Behind them are several talented youngsters as well as a few junior college transfers.

Chris Stratton, a hard-throwing (90-92 mph) sophomore right-handed pitcher from Tupelo, is coming off a season that saw him go 5-3 with a 5.29 earned run average and 76 strikeouts in 78 innings. He is expected to be MSU's Friday night starter in SEC action.

Junior right-hand pitcher Devin Jones (2-4, 8.16 ERA), whose fastball tops out at 95 miles per hour, is expected to be moved to an SEC weekend rotation starting spot after working in relief last season. He will either be the Saturday or Sunday starter.

Two lefties are expected to compete for the final spot in the SEC weekend starting rotation.

Junior Nick Routt, who battled arm issues last season after a standout freshman season that saw him go 5-3 with a 4.15 earned run average, appears to be healthy again, which could give him a leg up on the other candidate. The second lefty is sophomore Chad Girodo (2-3, 7.40 ERA). Chad, more of a control pitcher last season, added several miles per hour to his fastball and topped out at 90-91 mph during the fall with deception in his delivery.

Other pitchers expected to contribute significant innings during the 2011 season are junior Caleb Reed, sophomores Kendall Graveman and C.C. Watson, and true freshmen C.T. Bradford (88-90 mph fastball), Evan Mitchell (91-92 mph fastball), and Hunter Renfroe (during the fall Hunter had control issues but showed a low to mid-90s fastball at times). Graveman and Mitchell could figure in as the fifth starter and in long relief, while Watson should be a reliever. If completely healthy from their Tommy John surgeries, look for junior college transfer Tim Statz and redshirt junior Michael Dixon (low to mid-90s fastball) to be in the mix. Statz figures in more as a starter and Dixon as a late inning reliever.

Don't be surprised to see Bradford compete for closer duties based on his pitching performance during the fall scrimmages. He showed excellent control of an 88-91 fastball and an outstanding changeup.

Catching should be a strong point of the 'Dogs with two senior catchers returning, Wes Thigpen (.225, 4 home runs, 17 RBI) and Cody Freeman (.301, 3 home runs, 26 RBI). Both are solid defensively with Thigpen having the stronger arm. Also figuring in the mix will be Hunter Renfroe as well as junior college transfer Brett Bozeman.

The infield should be solid offensively and defensively with the return of seniors Nick Vickerson (.328, 8 HR, 27 RBI) at third and Jonathan Ogden (.207, 6, 28) at short, and sophomore Sam Frost (.248, 8, 13) at second. According to Cohen, Ogden made huge strides offensively since last season. Also returning after sitting out last season due to an injury is redshirt senior Jarrod Parks. He can play either first or third.

Also competing for playing time in the infield will be true freshmen Adam Frazier, Demarcus Henderson, Daryl Norris, Taylor Stark and Garrett Pitts.

The deepest part of the ball club is the outfield thanks to the return of Jaron Shepherd (.250, 1, 34, outstanding defender), Ryan Collins (.271, 0, 22), a healthy Brent Brownlee, who missed almost all of the 2010 season, and Trey Johnson (.279, 0, 3). Also in the mix will be newcomers C.T. Bradford, junior college transfer David Bishop (led the team in home runs during the fall scrimmages), and true freshman Cody Abraham. Based on his fall play, don't be surprised if Bradford earns a starting spot early in the season. A former Mr. Baseball in Florida, Bradford was one of the best hitters during the fall and showed an outstanding arm and exceptional defensive ability in the outfield.

EASTERN DIVISION

FLORIDA

by Cody Jones, Fightin' Gators

In three years as the Gators' head coach, Kevin O'Sullivan has built one of the deepest pitching staffs in America. Florida returns their top four starting pitchers from last season. Junior Alex Panteliodis (11-3, 3.51 ERA) was the ace last season. Florida made a run to the College World Series last year, even though two of their weekend starters were freshmen. Right-hander Hudson Randall (8-4, 3.24) and left-hander Brian Johnson (6-4, 4.03) were respectively first and third on the team in starts last season. Randall led the conference during league games with a 2.63 ERA. Redshirt junior Tommy Toledo (3-2, 4.39) also returns after missing two months last season when he broke his nose and suffered multiple facial fractures after taking a line drive off the face.

With all the starting pitching returning, the Gators got another boost after the MLB Draft. Karsten Whitson was the No. 9 overall picked by the San Diego Padres, but he turned down a reported $2.1 million dollars to come to campus. His mid-90s fastball and low-80s slider have the freshman pushing for a spot in the weekend rotation when the season starts.

The Gators have a hole at closer after left-hander Kevin Chapman was taken in the 4th round by the Kansas City Royals. The front-runners to replace him are sophomore Steven Rodriguez (2-0, 2.57) or Nick Maronde (2-0, 6.15). Rodriguez's fastball sits around 90 mph, but his cutter makes it difficult for hitters to have solid contact. Maronde walked 24 hitters in 26.1 innings pitched last season, but he also notched 37 strikeouts. His control must improve this offseason for him to win the job.

The Gators also return Anthony DeSclafani (2-3, 7.08), Michael Heller (0-0, 4.15) and Greg Larson (3-1, 5.70) to the bullpen. Freshmen Jonathan Crawford, Daniel Gibson and Keenan Kish will also see time on the mound.

In the field, the Florida coaches have options. It comes down to finding the best offensive lineup that sacrifices the least amount of defense. Preston Tucker (.331, 11 HR, 49 RBI) is expected to move from first base to right field. SEC Freshman of the Year Austin Maddox (.333, 17, 72) struggled in limited playing time at third base last season, but he a full offseason to work at the position has the Florida coaches thinking he can handle it this year.

When he's not pitching, Johnson (.405, 4, 21) will play first base. His emergence in the middle of the order last season jumpstarted the offense and gave Maddox the protection he needed.

Shortstop Nolan Fontana (.287, 3, 23) and second baseman Josh Adams (.224, 9, 42) return to anchor a middle infield that combined for nine errors in 601 chances. Fontana's .437 on-base percentage led last season's starters.

Adams put together a disappointing junior season after being named First Team All- SEC during his freshman and sophomore seasons. He hit .330 and .342 in his first two seasons, and he felt like fall practice got his swing back to where it was early in his career.

Mike Zunino (.267, 9, 41) started 52 games at catcher last season as a freshman. He created a reputation as the clutch hitter on the team, as he won three games with walk off hits. The runs he knocked in from the plate were important, but his defense is the most important thing to this team. He made two errors in 393 chances last season.

The only starter that has to be replaced from last season comes in center field. Matt den Dekker was one of the top defensive center fielders in the country, but he graduated and was selected in the 5th round by the New York Mets.

Sophomore Kamm Washington (.308, 1, 6) is expected to take over. He was having a good freshman season before sliding into a wall at Tennessee and tore his hamstring. He was fully recovered before the start of fall practice and is expected to be a starter this season.

Left field is expected to be a platoon situation between right-handed Daniel Pigott (.268, 1, 22) and left-handed Tyler Thompson (.301, 6, 28). Thompson came on at the end of last season, including a three-home run performance in a win over Florida Atlantic to clinch the Gainesville Regional. Pigott has been inconsistent during his career, but his athleticism makes him a candidate for a breakout season.

Some of the bench players include catcher/first baseman Ben McMahan (.325, 2, 11), third baseman/outfielder Bryson Smith (.255, 3, 22) and infielder Cody Dent (.233, 0, 2). Freshmen third baseman Zack Powers will also see playing time.

GEORGIA

by Dean Legge, Dawg Post

Coach David Perno has seen the good and bad during his ten years as the head baseball coach at Georgia. He also saw the ugly in 2010. Just two years prior, Perno had guided the Bulldogs to within one game of the national title. But in 2010 the Dawgs suffered one of the worst seasons in Georgia baseball history.

Perno said he tried to use this fall's practices as a way to pivot from the worst season of his career.

"From a standpoint of getting last year off our minds and getting people healthy, we've done that," he said. "You've got guys fighting for positions. You don't have it all figured out, but we are closer."

The Georgia head coach, who relied one youth in a big way last season, said that his 2011 team will have depth–as well as pitching.

"We have some depth this year. We have plenty of pitching," he said. "We had some good energy in fall practice. Defensively we have a chance if we can solidify the catching spot. Joey Delmonico has done a good job. We also get Brandon Stephens back. Everywhere else we have a chance to be as good and deep as we ever have been."

Delmonico is the middle son of former Tennessee Coach Rod Delmonico and has transferred into the program to give the Dawgs good depth at catcher. Stephens was an All-America at Lassiter where he batted .350 with seven home runs and 25 RBI for the Trojans.

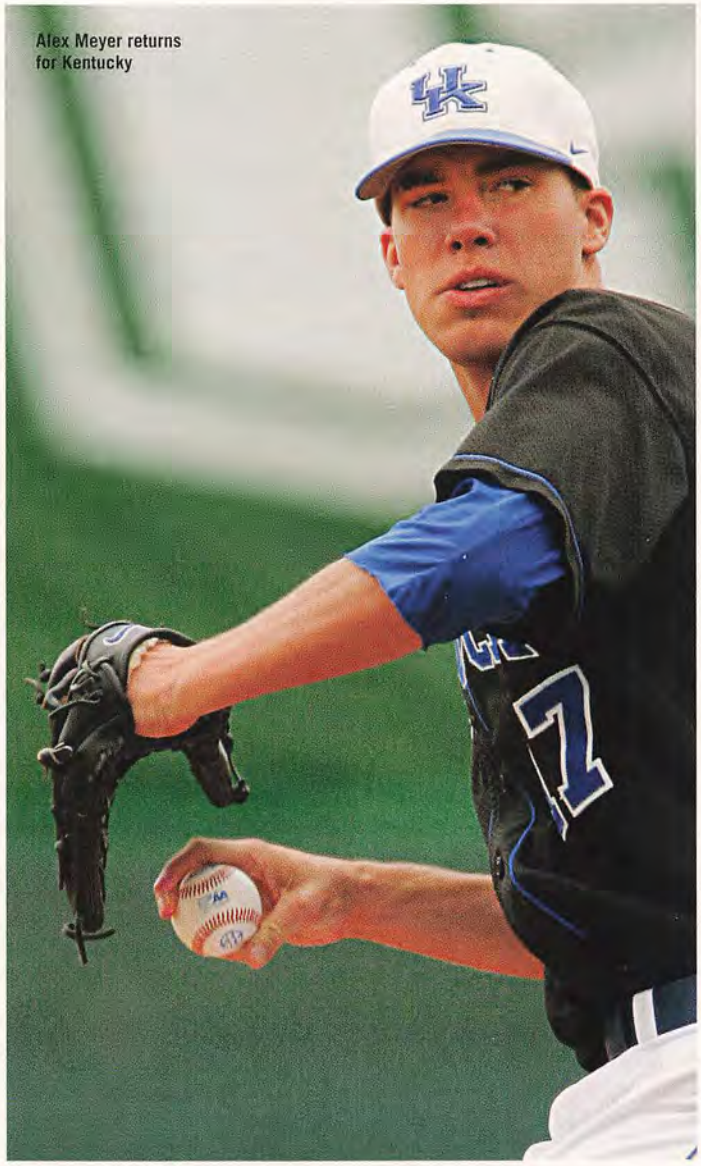
While figuring out who will line up behind the plate is important, the Bulldogs also hope to improve their hitting at this plate this spring.

"I think we've made improvements in hitting in the fall," outfielder Johnathan Taylor said.

But the Bulldogs have focused on pitching, which gave them such heartache last year.

"Our strikeout to walks ratio has improved, too," Taylor said.

"I am trying to work with the pitchers," pitcher Michael Palazzone said. "We are throwing a lot more strikes."



Alex Meyer returns for Kentucky

University of Kentucky

Palazzone, who also went to Lassiter and has twice been selected in the Major League Baseball Draft, will be a key to the pitching rotation. He made 16 appearances (13 starts) last season. His best effort last year came at Mississippi State where he allowed only five hits and two runs, and had nine strikeouts over seven innings.

If Palazzone and the rest of the pitchers can duplicate that sort of effort more often the Bulldogs could challenge for the SEC title.

"We are looking forward to putting last year bend us, and getting this thing turned around and headed back to Omaha," he said.

KENTUCKY

by Stephen John, Kentucky Sports Report

With so much up in the air, it can't be known how good Coach Gary Henderson's Kentucky Wildcats will be in 2011. One thing sure is that the team will be radically different from a year ago.

When MLB.com announced in June that junior outfielder/first baseman Lance Ray had signed a major-league deal with the Minnesota Twins, the news effectively guaranteed that major changes would occur. Ray, an eighth-round selection, was far and away UK's most consistent hitter. Ray finished the season with a team-high batting average of .356. He had 11 doubles, 10 home runs, 34 RBI and a team-high slugging

percentage of .720 in just 41 games and 29 starts.

Henderson's top priority will be to find offense. The loss of Ray's bat was just one of many losses Henderson must fill. The top five hitters from the 2010 season and all gone. Returning for the Cats are outfielder Chad Wright (.316, 37 RBI and 36 runs) and first baseman/pitcher Braden Kapteyn (.294, six home runs and 28 RBI).

The Wildcats recruiting class is heavy with pitchers, so a number of unproven players are going to have to step it up if Kentucky is expected to produce any offense this season.

The good news for Kentucky is that Henderson has brought in a solid core of young talent, nationally ranked as high as 16th in the nation by Collegiate Baseball.

"We are extremely excited about this group of newcomers," Henderson said. "Over the last few years, Kentucky baseball has become a fixture on the national recruiting scene and we continue to bring in some of the top talents in amateur baseball. Brad (Bohannon) and Brian (Green) have done an amazing job in finding the type of well- rounded student-athletes we want to represent UK. We can't wait to get these guys on the field and start getting ready for the 2011 season."

Henderson convinced the top prospects in the state of Kentucky to join the Cats, including Louisville Slugger Kentucky High School Player of the Year, left-handed pitcher Corey Littrell and Kentucky High School Mr. Baseball, J.T. Riddle. UK brings in a total of 17 newcomers, including four of the top seven prospects in the state. In addition to Littrell and Riddle, the crop includes Lexington Christian Academy outfielder Lucas Witt and Tates Creek right-hander Trevor Gott.

"It is very important for us to own the state of Kentucky, to continually get the best players in the state to play at home in Lexington, and we feel like we have done that with this group," Henderson said. "There were lots of talented prospects in Kentucky this season and we are thrilled to give them an opportunity to compete in the best conference in college baseball."

Kentucky expects big things right away from its top recruit, 6-foot-4, 200-pound freshman right-handed pitcher Jonathan Paquet, a native of Ancienne-Lorette, Quebec. UK has had success in its past with Canadian products. A member of the Canadian Junior National Team since 2008, Paquet pitched well in three games at the Word Junior

Baseball Championships in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 2010, making three appearances with two starts, striking out 12 in 10.1 innings and charting a 3.48 ERA and a 1-0 record.

SOUTH CAROLINA

by Paul Stewart, GamecockAnthem.com

Rebuilding is never easy. But after winning the national championship last season, South Carolina and Coach Ray Tanner will try to reload as they look for their 11th straight season of 40-plus wins. With a title (as well as a contract extension for Tanner through 2015) taken care of, Gamecocks fans are hoping the success generated by Tanner won't be ending anytime soon.

Tanner's 15th season at the helm for the Gamecocks will be one unlike any other as his team prepares to repeat as College World Series champions.

The Gamecocks will get the season started on February 18 as they host Santa Clara for a three game series at Carolina Stadium. USC opens their SEC slate with the Georgia Bulldogs on March 18 to start a 30-game conference grind.

Last year's team was able to complete a historic run in Rosenblatt Stadium on the strength of its pitching staff, and although some of the names have changed, pitching will again be a strength for the Gamecocks.

Gone are staff stalwarts Blake Cooper and Sam Dyson, but the Gamecocks do return seasoned starters such as Tyler Webb, Nolan Belcher, and Colby Holmes. But the quality doesn't end there, with middle relievers Jose Mata and Steven Neff returning after strong performances in 2010. Sunday starter Jay Brown will also have to be replaced after he exhausted his eligibility last year.

Michael Roth, who had two huge pitching performances in Omaha last season, will also return and could either start or continue his work as a left-handed specialist.

The late relief may be the most talented section of the pitching staff, with the nearly un-hittable Matt Price coming back to pair with Ethan Carter to combine talent with experience.

There will be a new man leading the Gamecocks pitching staff as Jerry Meyers returns to Columbia after a six year run as the head coach at Old Dominion. Meyers previously coached the South Carolina pitchers from 1997-2004 and helped usher in a new era of success during three straight CWS appearances from 2002-2004. Mark Calvi departed to accept the head coaching position at South Alabama following last season's title.

USC will also bring back experience in the field, led by second baseman Scott Wingo, who scored the winning run in the CWS while playing stellar defense throughout the season. Third baseman Adrian Morales also returns to help provide a solid backbone on in the field.

The Gamecocks will receive reinforcements in the form of another heralded recruiting class, and may count on young players like shortstop T.J. Costen and first baseman Kyle Martin.

If South Carolina is able to retool a weekend rotation that will feature new faces and keep a dominating bullpen, USC has a great chance to return to Omaha and defend the title. The Gamecocks were considered by most a relatively light hitting team last year, and will continue to use fundamentals combined with great defense to rack up wins.

And as long as Ray Tanner is leading the charge, those wins shouldn't be too hard to come by.

TENNESSEE

by James Bryant, Rocky Top News

Tennessee baseball improved last season, so much so that the Vols were just a few breaks and a little luck from making the SEC Tournament.

While that didn't happen, fourth-year Coach Todd Raleigh saw improvement last spring, including a winning record (30-26). More importantly, he said there was vast improvement during fall baseball. "We had a great fall season," Raleigh said. "We made a lot of big strides this fall. We will have a lot of new faces this season."
Consistency, especially on the mound, was one of the key factors that kept the Vols from taking that next step last season.

"We really pitched well this fall," said Raleigh. "We will finally have depth at that position as well as at other places on the field."

One of the Vols' most consistent pitchers was junior lefty Steven Gruver. "Steven will play a major role for us this spring," Raleigh said. "He was one of our best pitchers last spring and he will even be better this season."

Raleigh is also pleased with sophomore pitcher Drew Steckenrider. "Drew is getting stronger all the time," Raleigh said. "We are expecting big things from him."

Last spring, Steckenrider was a starter in the outfield and pitched on a limited basis. This spring those roles will be reversed.

Redshirt freshman Jon Reed is another reason that Raleigh is happier these days.

Add the return of senior Rob Catapano and the addition of Jerrod Peper, and Raleigh has the makings of an all-star pitching cast.

Defense is expected to be another strong suit for the Vols, particularly with most of the infield returning.

The infield has shortstop Zach Osborn with Matt Duffy at third and senior Khayan Norfolk at second.

The two biggest changes will be at first base and catcher.

"Losing Cody Hawn (first base) and Blake Forsyth (catcher) isn't easy, but I think we will be okay at those two spots," Raleigh said. "Davis Morgan will be at first and we will count on Matt Ramsey at the catcher position."

Ramsey, who was last year's closer, will also see action in that role. Others expected to battle for the first base position will be Tyler Horne and Josh Lyles.

Andrew Toles, a true freshman, is expected to play center, Chris Fritts at left and either Charlie Thurber or Josh Lyles in right.
Raleigh believes Vols are in perhaps the toughest league and division in

the country.

"Florida returns everyone, South Carolina is going to be really good, they just won the National Championship," Raleigh said. "Vanderbilt bring backs a lot of guys and I like our chances as well."

VANDERBILT

by Don Yates, VandyMania.com

The 2011 Vanderbilt baseball team hopes to improve on the strides made by the 2010 team. Last season's 46-20 squad advanced to the Tallahassee Super Regional, but lost the series to Florida State two games to one. The 2011 Vanderbilt squad returns the majority of its pitching and hitting and looks stronger and more experienced.

On the mound the Commodores lost their top relief arm in Chase Reid but return the three top starters. Vandy's Friday pitcher will likely again be junior right hander Sonny Gray. Gray (3.48 ERA), who played for Team USA over the summer, struck out 113 batters last season while walking just 48. Senior Taylor Hill and junior Jack Armstrong, both righties, will battle it out for the Saturday starting spot. The 27 walks by Hill (4.46 ERA) were by far the fewest of the three top starters, but the 12 home runs he allowed were by far the most on the team. The

6-foot-7 Armstrong, the son of a major league pitcher, finished the 2010 season strong en-route to a 7-4 record (4.71 ERA) that included 50 strikeouts and 39 walks.

Lefty Grayson Garvin (1.25 ERA) could slip into Vanderbilt's starting rotation or he might emerge as the Commodores' top relief arm. Righties Will Clinard, Navery Moore, and Mark Lamm, and lefties Sam Selman and Corey Williams will also vie for innings of work. Incoming freshman left handed pitcher Kevin Ziomek could also contribute.

Vanderbilt returns the majority of its positional players. Shortstop Brian Harris has graduated but first baseman Aaron Westlake, second baseman Anthony Gomez and third baseman Jason Esposito are all back. Last season Westlake led the team in home runs with 14 and was named to the NCAA Louisville Regional All-Tournament team after hitting .300 with 7 RBIs, two home runs and 8 runs scored. Gomez was named a Collegiate Baseball Freshman All-America after leading the Commodores in hitting with a .379 average. Esposito was named to the

NCAA Louisville Regional All-Tournament team after hitting .476 (10-for-21) with five RBIs, two doubles and a home run.

Junior Riley Reynolds possibly could take over for Harris at shortstop. Reynolds batted .332 and earned All-SEC honors as a freshman two years ago playing at second base. Last season Reynolds struggled through a hitting slump and slipped out of the starting line-up. Reynolds, though, worked hard on his hitting during the off season and had five hits in the Commodores' October series at Texas.

Andrew Giobbi is gone at catcher but senior Curt Casali appears poised to take over at the position. Casali was 7-for-14 in the Super Regional against Florida State and batted .309 for the season.

The Vanderbilt outfield returns intact. Joe Loftus, who batted .277 with 8 home runs, is back at right field. Bryan Johns returns at left field after batting .370 last season. Connor Harrell (.300) and Mike Yastrzemski (.260) each saw starting assignments last season in the outfield and will compete for the third spot.

SEC TO HAVE THURSDAY GAMES FOR TELEVISION

Among the things known about Southeastern Conference baseball games is that single games are played on Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday. Another thing known about the SEC is that it will make concessions in order to get games on television, and that will be the case this season.

One series each week for the final seven weeks of SEC regular season competition will be played on Thursday and Friday nights and Saturday so that an SEC game can be televised on Thursday night by ESPNU. There will be other baseball games televised (by ESPN and by other networks), and these are the only series that will begin on Thursdays.

ESPNU's inaugural Thursday Night SEC Baseball Game of the Week will begin Thursday, April 7, and will run seven-straight weeks through May 19. A Thursday night national game of the week is a first for the college sport, and features all eight conference teams that earned NCAA postseason bids in 2010.

"ESPNU is thrilled to feature a seven-week SEC Thursday night baseball series," said Rosalyn Durant, vice president, ESPNU. "Showcasing the vast talent of SEC baseball is great for the sport, fans, league and ESPNU. We appreciate the partnership with the SEC in creating this consistent Thursday night national package."

SEC baseball is coming off a successful season that saw South Carolina win the 2010 National Championship Series, Florida advanced to the College World Series and eight SEC teams overall earned a NCAA postseason bid. It marked the sixth time since 2000 and the third straight year an SEC team played for the national title.

ESPNU cited the fact that it will televise games featuring the 2010 national champion South Carolina, the 2010 SEC Tournament Champion LSU, and SEC regular season champion Florida. Top 25 teams that advanced to the 2010 NCAA Champions Tournament–Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, Florida, LSU, Ole Miss, South Carolina, and Vanderbilt–will all be televised.

"The Thursday night package of SEC games on ESPNU is a great opportunity for us to showcase the outstanding baseball that is played in our conference," said SEC Commissioner Mike Slive. "The ESPNU package will be able to draw attention to the outstanding game-day atmosphere we have at our baseball stadiums as well as the rich tradition and history of SEC baseball."

The schedule of Thursday night games:

April 7 South Carolina at Tennessee; April 14 Tennessee at Alabama; April 21 Ole Miss at Auburn; April 28 Kentucky at LSU; May 5 Florida at Arkansas; May 12 Mississippi State at Ole Miss; and May 19 Vanderbilt at Georgia.

NEW BATS IN SEC

The Southeastern Conference, and all NCAA baseball teams, will be using new bats this year. Although still aluminum, the bats do not perform at the previous level.

The bats are expected to improve safety for the players. Additionally, lower scoring games are usually faster-played games, which could play into television concerns. Television wants baseball games to be concluded in under three hours.

According to Tennessee Coach Todd Raleigh, the changes that the NCAA and SEC have made in the bats will cause the biggest noticeable difference in the game that he has ever seen.

"The bats are totally different," Raleigh stated. "Everywhere in the country home run numbers were down. No one will hit 80 home runs this season."

"The college game will really change this spring," Raleigh said. "It will be more like a wooden bat game than ever before. It will be interesting to see how it affects the league. It's going to be more of a defensive-type game all the way around. A lot more strategy will be involved, speed will play an important factor in your success."

Alabama Coach Mitch Gaspard said, "In a typical year we would hit 60-80 home runs and I think this year that number will be cut in half at the least.

"At our SEC head coaches meeting, everyone said that through 15 fall scrimmages, everyone was hitting seven or eight home runs.

"Before [the bat change] in batting practice we'd hit 20-25 home runs every day. Now it's 2-4 with big strong guys getting pitches.

"You're going to see a major impact in the game this year. It will bring the game down to pitching, defense, execution.

"We played a lot of that style last year–a lot more bunting and a lot more hit-and-run.

"The fans will notice immediately how the bat performs."

Auburn Coach John Pawlowski said, "With the difference in the bats this year, there will be more emphasis put on efficient strike throwers." ■

Coach Patrick Miurphy and catcher Kendall Dawson

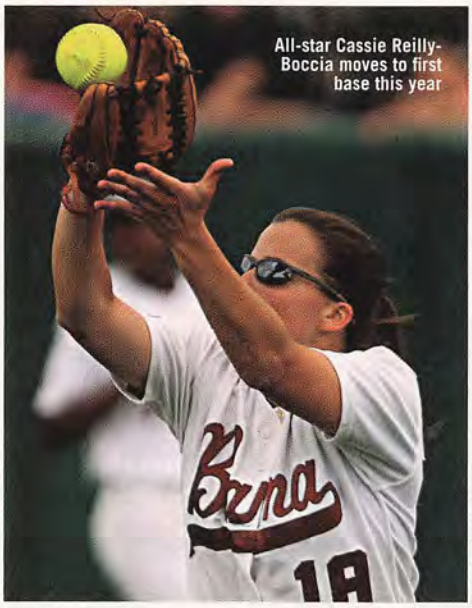
BUILDING ON SUCCESS

It looks like another good Tide team

Build on success. That is what the 2011 Alabama Crimson Tide softball team looks to do this season. While the Tide lost two-time Southeastern Conference Player of the Year Charlotte Morgan and 2010 senior leaders Alex Blewitt and Jessica Smith, Alabama returns nine starters from a team that won the Southeastern Conference regular season and tournament championships en route to claiming the number one overall seed in the NCAA Division I tournament.

"We only lost three young ladies from last year's team," Coach Patrick Murphy said. "Those are three big losses for us and now we have to plug in those holes."

Murphy's 2010 signing class, which was ranked third nationally by ESPN Rise, brings in four talented freshmen including a pitcher, catcher and two infielders. All four freshmen earned all-state honors in high school and two were NFCA and Under Armour All-Americas.



All-star Cassie Reilly-Boccia moves to first base this year

University of Alabama

"Our freshmen have been probably better than expected," Murphy said. "We've really been lucky with the type of kids we have been getting. They all have great work ethic, are great kids, and low maintenance. All four are fitting in, they do great with their teammates and I think everybody loves them."

The future continues to look bright for the Crimson Tide softball program as the squad has only two seniors this season. Kelsi Dunne and Whitney Larsen have both stepped into leadership roles this fall, as they look to go out on top.

"They have kind of shouldered the load this fall," Murphy said. "They have both done a great job of showing the younger players how to do things the right way."

Murphy said that the overall improvement of team defense would be a key to success in 2011 and that it was a major focus throughout fall workouts. "We lost 11 games last year and we were either tied or leading in the sixth inning in seven of those games. Team defense was our Achilles heel in those losses."

Here, by position, is a look at the 2011 Crimson Tide softball team:

CATCHER–The Crimson Tide looks to improve its offensive production from the backstop this season, while keeping a sharp defensive unit behind the plate.

"We're still working with Kendall Dawson on her consistency at the plate," Murphy said. "When she gets the barrel on the ball, she hits it as hard as anyone on the team. We just need her to do it more often."

Murphy said that Olivia Gibson was among the team's most improved players this fall. "She is maturing not only as a person, but as an athlete and a leader," Murphy said. "She has been much better offensively this fall than in the past two years and caught one of her best games here this fall."

The Alabama skipper said that the two veterans, along with newcomer Jordan Patterson could share time behind the plate this season. "All of them do a really good job of catching and throwing," Murphy said. "It is going to come down to who is the hotter hitter. I think it is really up for grabs right now."

PITCHER–"I think this could be one of the strongest pitching staffs we have ever had," Murphy said. Coming from a program with multiple All-Americans coming out of the circle, it is clear Murphy feels very confident about hurlers Kelsi Dunne, Lauren Sewell, and Jackie Traina.

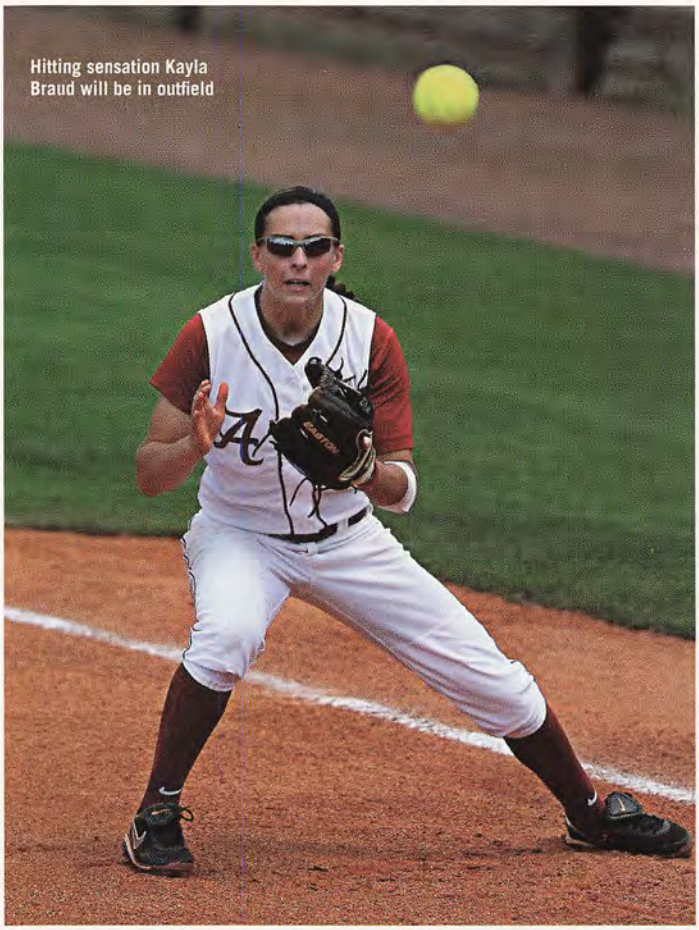
While only time will tell how the 2011 pitching staff matches up to those of the past, heading into the season, it seems sure to be the hardest throwing staff Alabama has ever produced.

"Sewell and Traina both hit 70 on the radar gun this fall and Kelsi actually looks stronger and faster than ever before," Murphy said. "I think the sky is the limit with those three. This could be one of those years where you see us using the staff like a major league baseball team, picking and choosing matchups of who would be more successful against certain hitters. In softball with the reentry rule, it will allow us to do that easily. They are going to be fun to coach and fun to watch. As a group they are probably the strongest we have had in our 15 years here."

Dunne capped off a 2010 season where she earned All-America honors once again and became just the second pitcher in school history to be named the SEC Pitcher of the Year.

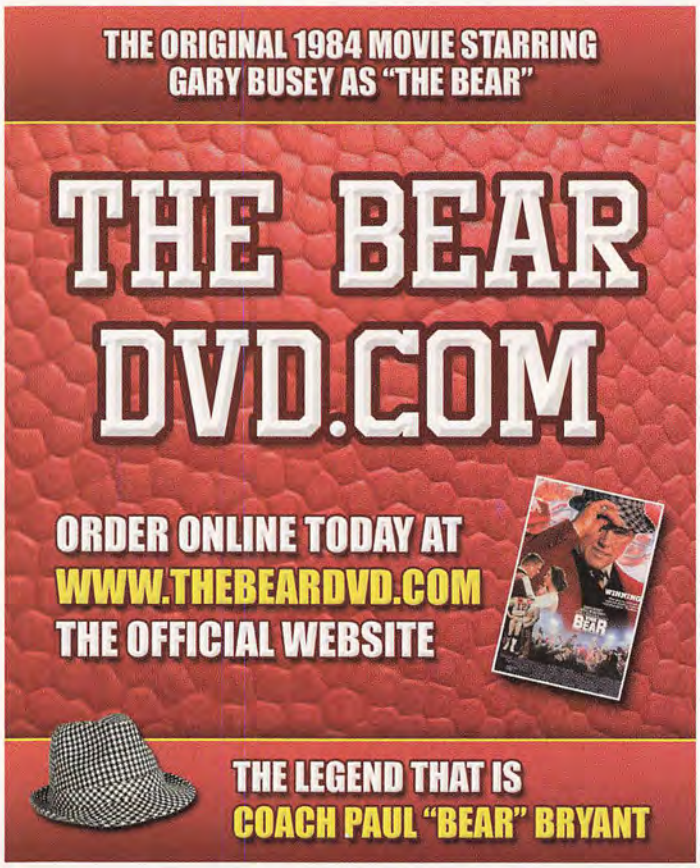
Dunne set the single season school record with a career-best 355 strikeouts, doing so in just 213 innings pitched. The right-hander posted a 1.97 ERA and sported a 30-6 record while opposing batters hit at only a .178 clip.

Sewell finished with a 10-1 record in her rookie campaign and posted a 2.15 ERA. The freshman struck out 80 in 65 innings and gained valuable experience by earning a win in the NCAA Tuscaloosa Regional.



Hitting sensation Kayla Braud will be in outfield

University of Alabama



INFIELD–Take a look around the SEC and you will be hard pressed to find an infield as deep and as talented as the one the Tide will field this year. What was considered to be a liability at times defensively in 2010 looks to be a strong suit for the Tide this spring.

"You could see four different kids out there every single game," Murphy said. "It all comes down to who has the hottest bat."

Cassie Reilly-Boccia and Amanda Locke look to share time at first base this season. Murphy noted that the leadership of Reilly-Boccia at first will be important with the loss of Morgan.

The Tide has a plethora of options up the middle with Whitney Larsen, Jackey Branham, Ryan Iamurri and Kaila Hunt are all players that could see time at either second base or shortstop this season.

"Defensively I think they have all looked pretty good," Murphy said of the quartet. "Offensively it kind of goes from older to younger, but I would feel comfortable with putting any of them out there."

Third base will see the return of Courtney Conley, who had an impressive freshman year, despite a midseason injury. "Conley did really well this fall," Murphy said. "I think she could be one of our best hitters. She showed a lot of pop as a freshman and had four home runs this fall." Murphy noted that Hunt, Larsen and Branham are all prepared to see time at the hot corner if needed this spring.

Larsen anchored the infield and provided some pop from the cleanup spot. Larsen batted .318 and added 15 home runs and ranked second on the team with 57 RBI, all career highs for the Vestavia Hills native.

OUTFIELD–Looking at the Crimson Tide outfield heading into 2011, it is hard to envision many balls finding the turf. With a core group, including Jennifer Fenton, Jazlyn Lunceford, Keima Davis and Kayla Braud, the Alabama outfield could be the fastest collective group in the nation.

The newest face to the outfield is not a new face to the team, but an All-America changing positions. Kayla Braud will trade in her infielder's glove and head to the outfield in 2011. The sophomore will continue her lead-off roll and likely start in left field this spring. Murphy said he was excited about the switch and looked forward to seeing her progress.

Braud jumped onto the scene as a freshman, putting together one of the better freshmen campaigns in the history of college softball. The Eugene, Oregon, native broke the single season school record in batting average, by posting a .505 clip and also added 95 hits, 75 runs and 45 stolen bases.

Murphy said that Lunceford and Cassie Reilly-Boccia could both see time in left field as well this year.

Center field will see the return of Jennifer Fenton and Keima Davis who both saw time in the position last year. "Between the two, I think they both cover more ground than just about any other outfielder in the country," Murphy said. "We like that because we can play our two corners closer to the line and let the center fielder roam, because they can both cover the ground."

Davis was much improved in the fall according to the Tide's skipper. "She is a totally different kid," Murphy said. "She has much more confidence. Her arm strength was incredible and her bat was very improved. I think she is going to have a breakout year."

Junior Jazlyn Lunceford could be one of the most exciting prospects of the 2011 outfield. Lunceford, who has become known for her clutch performances at the plate, projects as the starting right fielder. "We need her consistency," Murphy said. "If she can get on base for us once every game, I think we're going to have a really good offensive team."

The 2011 schedule will prove to be another tough one for the Tide. Alabama has been one of the national leaders in strength of schedule the last few seasons and it paid off a year ago when the Tide was awarded the number one seed in the 2010 NCAA tournament.

The Tide will play a total of 33 games against teams that made the NCAA Division I tournament last season, including nine games against four different 2010 Women's College World Series participants.

Alabama will get a heavy dose of tournament action to kickoff the 2011 season, partaking in five tourneys in the first five weekends of the season. The Tide will open the season in the All-Alabama Classic, which will feature every division I team from the state.

The Tide will host the Bama Bash, which will feature Louisville, Syracuse and Texas-San Antonio. Alabama heads to Florida for back-to-back tournaments, first participating in USF tournament in Tampa and then the prestigious ESPN Rise tournament in Lake Buena Vista. Bama will host the SEC/ACC Challenge, which will start on March 11.

"We are looking forward to another very challenging schedule," Murphy said. "The SEC-ACC Challenge will be one of the best four-team tournaments in the country. Our fans deserve to see great teams at home. Florida State and North Carolina should both be top-20 teams."

The 2011 season will be the first in SEC softball history in which weekend series are played over three days, rather than two. Weekend SEC series hosted in Tuscaloosa will begin with a 6:30 p.m., game on Friday evenings, followed by games two and three at 1:30 p.m., on Saturdays and Sundays. ■

Jazlyn Lunceford is outfield candidate

University of Alabama

2011 ALABAMA SOFTBALL ROSTER

No	Name	B-T	Ht/Wt	Pos	Class	Hometown
4	Jackey Branham	Inf	5-9	So		Troy, Mo.
1	Kayla Braud	Inf	5-6	So		Eugene, Ore.
9	Courtney Conley	Inf	5-9	So		Robertsville, Mo.
3	Kelma Davis	OF	5-9	So		Deerfield Beach, Fla.
12	Kendall Dawson	C	5-9	Jr		Plant City, Fla.
00	Kelsi Dunne	P	6-0	Sr		Port Orange, Fla.
7	Jennifer Fenton	OF	5-4	Jr		Kennesaw, Ga.
24	Olivia Gibson	C	5-9	Jr		Tuscaloosa
10	Kaila Hunt	Inf	5-5	Fr		Evans, Ga.
32	Ryan Iamurri	Inf	4-10	Fr		Naples, Fla.
20	Whitney Larsen	Ut	5-9	Sr		Vestavia Hills
22	Amanda Locke	Ut	5-11	Jr		Mesquite, Texas
2	Jazlyn Lunceford	OF	5-6	Jr		Northport
6	Jordan Patterson	C-Inf	5-7	Fr		Tuscaloosa
18	Cassie Reilly-Boccia	OF-1B	5-6	Jr		Yorktown Hgts., N.Y.
11	Lauren Sewell	P	5-6	So		Pembroke Pines, Fla.
33	Jackie Traina	P-Ut	5-11	Fr		Naples, Fla.

HEAD COACH: Patrick Murphy
ASSOCIATE HEAD COACH: Alyson Habetz
ASSISTANT COACH: Vann Stuedeman

FOOTBALL BY KIRK McNAIR

JULIO WAS BEST

Notes from 2010 Crimson Tide football season

Benjamin Cohen

Football awards don't wait for the end of football season, meaning following football bowl games. Alabama isn't going to have the individual awards it had in 2009, when the Crimson Tide won the national championship and players reaped honors such as Mark Ingram winning the Heisman Trophy and Rolando McClain taking the Butkus Award. Nevertheless, in Bama's 9-3 regular season there were noteworthy achievements.

It was no surprise at the Alabama team banquet when junior wide receiver Julio Jones was named the Tide's most outstanding player. He was also one of three Bama players named first team All-Southeastern Conference by the Associated Press.

Julio Jones produced the best season for a wide receiver in school history with 75 receptions for 1,084 yards and seven receiving touchdowns. He also rushed for 99 yards on six carries and one touchdown.

Jones was joined on the AP first team All-SEC squad by sophomore offensive guard Barrett Jones and junior safety Mark Barron.

Barrett Jones was the anchor of the Crimson Tide offensive front. The sophomore helped the Tide average 435.6 yards per game on offense and 6.86 yards per play, which was the second-best mark in school history.

Barron was Alabama's leader in the secondary with a team-high 75 tackles. He did a little of everything for the Tide defense with three tackles for loss, two sacks, three interceptions, six pass break-ups, and a forced fumble. Barron underwent surgery following the Auburn game to repair a torn muscle and was unable to participate in the Crimson Tide's Capital One Bowl game against Michigan State in Orlando on January 1, 2011.

Alabama's Capital One appearance was to be the Crimson Tide's national record 58th bowl game. The Tide went into the game with an official record of 31-22-3, a Cotton Bowl victory over Texas Tech having been vacated by NCAA rule. No team has more bowl victories than Alabama.

Junior running back Mark Ingram headlined the Alabama representatives on the AP second team. Also selected were senior left tackle James Carpenter, junior defensive lineman Marcell Dareus, junior linebacker Dont'a Hightower, and sophomore free safety Robert Lester, who led the SEC with seven interceptions.

Although Ingram missed the first two games of the season after undergoing knee surgery a week before the opening game, he went into the bowl game with 146 carries for 816 yards and 11 touchdowns. He had averaged 5.6 yards per carry. He also had 20 pass receptions for 252 yards and one touchdown. He went into the Capital One Bowl within one score of tying UA's career rushing touchdown record of 41 by Shaun Alexander.

Earning AP All-SEC honorable mention were senior quarterback Greg McElroy and junior center William Vlachos.

The Senior Bowl in Mobile extended invitations to McElroy, Carpenter, and tight end Preston Dial.

For the second consecutive year, there were three representatives from the SEC on the Academic All-America team, and for the second consecutive year two of the three were from Alabama.

McElroy was selected the ESPN Academic All-American of the Year and Barrett Jones was named with McElroy as a first-team ESPN Academic All-America. It marks Jones' second straight year on the Academic All-America team after earning second-team honors a season ago. Jones is also the third Crimson Tide player to twice be selected as an Academic All-America, joining Johnny Musso (1970-71) and Randy Hall (1973-74).

McElroy becomes just the second Alabama student-athlete to earn Academic All-American of the Year honors. Stephanie Kite, a women's gymnast, was also selected as the ESPN Academic All-American of the Year on the At-Large Team in 2004.

McElroy, who went into the Capital One Bowl game 23-3 as a starting quarterback for the Crimson Tide, graduated in three years with a degree in business marketing and is finishing his graduate degree in sports administration this fall. He completed his undergraduate work with a 3.82 GPA and has a 4.0 in graduate school.

This year he has completed 209 of 296 passes, 70.6 per cent, for 2,767 yards and 19 touchdowns with only five interceptions for a 166.9 efficiency rating.

Jones boasts a perfect 4.0 grade point average in finance during his third year of course work in Tuscaloosa. He is a two-time first-team All-District IV selection and was a second-team ESPN

Academic All-American last season. He was a member of the 2009 SEC Freshman Academic Honor Roll and the 2010 SEC Academic Honor Roll. Jones is also a member of Phi Eta Sigma, Alpha Lambda Delta, Golden Key Sigma Alpha Lambda and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars.

McElroy, Barron and Hightower were announced as Alabama's 2010 captains. They will participate in a ceremony on A-Day (expected to be April 16) at Denny Chimes in which their hand- and foot-prints will be added to those of previous Alabama captains on the Quad.

Other team awards this season are:

Iron Man Award: freshman cornerback Dee Milliner, junior nose guard Josh Chapman, junior linebacker Courtney Upshaw and sophomore tight end Michael Williams.

Commitment to Academic Excellence Award: junior running back Mark Ingram, sophomore guard Barrett Jones, junior tight end Brad Smelley, sophomore running back Trent Richardson, freshman kicker Cade Foster and junior wide receiver Julio Jones.

Outstanding Senior Scholar: quarterback Greg McElroy and linebacker Drew Bullard.

Unsung Hero Award: sophomore cornerback Dre Kirkpatrick, senior wide receiver Earl Alexander, senior linebacker Chavis Williams and junior cornerback Dequan Menzie.

Outstanding Defensive Performer Award: junior safety Mark Barron and junior linebacker Dont'a Hightower.

Up-Front Award: junior defensive end Marcell Dareus, junior linebacker Courtney Upshaw, sophomore guard Barrett Jones and junior center William Vlachos.

Most Inspiring Player: junior safety Mark Barron.

Defensive Achievement Award: sophomore free safety Robert Lester, freshman linebacker C.J. Mosley, and junior nose guard Josh Chapman.

Offensive Achievement Award: sophomore guard Chance Warmack, junior wide receiver Marquis Maze and sophomore tailback Trent Richardson.

President's Award: junior defensive lineman Nick Gentry, senior defensive end Luther Davis, junior wide receiver Darius Hanks and senior offensive tackle James Carpenter.

Special Teams Award: junior wide receiver Brandon Gibson, sophomore defensive back Will Lowery and sophomore running back Trent Richardson.

Defensive Player of the Year: junior linebacker Dont'a Hightower and junior safety Mark Barron.

Offensive Player of the Year: senior quarterback Greg McElroy and junior running back Mark Ingram.

Pat Trammell Award: senior tight end Preston Dial and senior offensive lineman David Ross.

Jefferson County Alumni Association Distinguished Alumnus Award: Jeremiah Castille.

Alabama had 14 players selected to Phil Steele's 2010 All-SEC Team, including four on the first team and three on the second team.

The Jones Boys – wide receiver Julio and offensive guard Barrett – were first team offense and defensive lineman Marcell Dareus and safety Mark Barron were first team defense.

Ingram, Carpenter and Lester were on the second team.

Steel's third team included Vlachos, Hightower, and kickoff returner Trent Richardson.

Marquis Maze was named to the fourth team as a punt return along with Josh Chapman on the defensive line, Courtney Upshaw at linebacker and Dre Kirkpatrick at cornerback.

Alabama Assistant Coach Jim McElwain interviewed for the head coaching job at Colorado, but the Buffaloes went with a former CU player, Washington Redskins Assistant Coach JonEmbree.

Bama Running Backs Coach Burton Burns is among those listed as in the mix for the head job at Louisiana-Lafayette. Burns is a native of New Orleans. ■

2011 ALABAMA FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	SERIES RECORD*	LAST GAME*
September 3	Kent State	Tuscaloosa	First Meeting	N/A
September 10	Penn State	University Park, Penn.	9-5-0	2010 UA 24, PSU 3
September 17	North Texas	Tuscaloosa	3-0-0	2009 UA 53, NT 7
September 24	Arkansas	Tuscaloosa	14-7-0	2010 UA 24, Ark 20
October 1	Florida	Gainesville	23-14-0	2010 UA 31, UF 6
October 8	Vanderbilt	Tuscaloosa	58-19-4	2007 UA 24, VU 10
October 15	Ole Miss	Oxford	47-9-2	2010 UA 23, UM 10
October 22	Tennessee	Tuscaloosa	48-38-7	2010 UA 41, UT 10
October 29	Open			
November 5	LSU	Tuscaloosa	45-24-5	2010 LSU 24, UA 21
November 12	Mississippi State	Starkville	75-17-3	2010 UA 30, MSU 10
November 19	Georgia Southern	Tuscaloosa	First Meeting	N/A
November 26	Auburn	Auburn	40-34-1	2010 AU 28, UA 27
December 3	SEC Championship Game	Atlanta	3 wins, 4 losses	2009 UA 32, Florida 13
January 9, 2012	BCS Championship	New Orleans	1 win, 0 loss	2009 UA 37, Texas 21

GETTING ON BOARD

TIDE WINTER, SPRING SPORTS ADD EARLY SIGNEES

Early November, and thoughts turn to spring. And to winter. That's because there is an early signing period available for most spring and winter sports. Alabama Crimson Tide coaches have taken advantage of this one-week signing period to ink most—perhaps all—the new performers to be added for the 2011-12 season.

The greatest attention in this early signing period is on men's basketball, and as previously announced Coach Anthony Grant added four players—Levi Randolph, a 6-6 shooting guard from Madison who is a Scout five-star; Rodney Cooper, a 6-5 guard from Russell County in Phenix City; Nick Jacobs, a 6-9, 250-pound forward from South Atlanta; and Moussa Gueye, a 7-0, 270-pound center from Lake Land Junior College in Matoon, Illinois.

There will be another signing period for winter and spring sports in the spring, and it is no secret that Grant would like to pick up one more player, specifically 6-2 guard Trevor Lacey of Huntsville Butler.

Alabama Women's Basketball Coach Wendell Hudson announced three junior college signees in the early period. They are 6-1 power forward Kyra Crosby of Gulf Coast (listed as the number one junior college player in America), shooting guard Jessica Merritt of Pensacola State, and guard Meghan Perkins at Pensacola State.

Since then, Hudson announced one more, Aneesah Daniels, a 6-0 power forward from Decatur, Georgia.

"Adding Aneesah puts the icing on the cake," Hudson said. "We started looking at her when we first took over two seasons ago, and we are really excited about her being part of the program. We think she can come in as a freshman and contribute immediately."

The Dan Olson Collegiate Girls Report has her as the No. 69 overall recruit in the nation. As a junior, Daniels helped lead Redan High School to a 30-1 record and the Class AAAAA state championship. She averaged 12.4 points per game and 10.6 rebounds per game en route to earning second team all-state honors last season. Daniels had a breakout performance against Douglass High School where she contributed 20 points and 20 rebounds.

"As we neared the start of this early signing period, we decided we really wanted this group of four outstanding players, and we are so excited that we got them all," Hudson added. "You cannot ask for much more than that."

Here's a look at the November Alabama signees in other sports:

BASEBALL

Mitch Gaspard and his staff added eight new players–four position players and four pitchers. The 2011 class includes six high school players and two junior college transfers who will join the Tide in the fall of 2011. Six of the eight players joining the Tide hail from Alabama.

"Our motto here is 'Play Hard. Get Dirty,'" Gaspard said. "The first thing we want is a guy who plays with passion and plays with an attitude. We feel like all of these guys are blue-collar, hard-nosed players who are going to fit into our system."

Position players joining the Tide are A.J. Cole, Windham Jackson, Ben Moore, and Cameron Carlisle. New pitchers are Jonathan Keller, Taylor Gilbeau, Jake Hubbard, and Ian Gardeck.

A native of Huntsville, Cole comes to The Capstone ranked as the No. 4 player in state by Perfect Game USA. Recruiting Coordinator Dax Norris said, "He's probably the best player in the state position-player wise. We feel like he can play shortstop and third base for us. He can really swing the bat."

A native of Grove Hill, Jackson joins the Tide ranked as the No. 18 player in Alabama. He attended Jackson High School where he caught, played first base, and also played in the outfield. "He can really run and he's got some power in his bat," Norris said. "He's another kid that plays the game the right way; a blue-collar kid."

A native of Cullman, Moore comes to Tuscaloosa after a highly decorated high school career. He was the MVP of Cullman High School's 2010 varsity squad and was named the 2010 Area Player of the Year. Also during the 2010 season Moore tied the school's home run record with 15. Moore, also a member of the football team, is currently second all-time on the CHS single-season rushing list, scurrying for 2,036 yards this past season."He's a tough kid and we're looking for a lot from him," Norris said.

A native of Tuscaloosa, Carlisle returns home after playing one year at Central Alabama Community College. Carlisle dominated the junior college circuit, hitting .375 with 42 runs and 38 RBI in only 45 games. Prior to attending CACC, Carlisle graduated from Hillcrest High School. "He is one of the top JUCO hitters in the state and probably in the South," Norris said. "He brings a veteran bat to add in with the young guys."

A native of Maylene, Keller signs with the Tide ranked as the No. 6 player in the state according to Perfect Game USA. The lefty was named a preseason Perfect Game USA Third-Team High School All-American entering his senior year at Thompson. Keller was also named the 2010 Birmingham News All-Shelby County Pitcher of the Year, a year in which he struck out 51 batters in only 41.2 innings. "He's one of the top left-handers in the state," Norris said. "He's been up to 92-93 mph and will be a frontline guy for our staff."

A native of Zachary, Louisiana, Guilbeau, also a left-handed pitcher, was Zachary High School's top pitcher last spring, going 10-3 with an outstanding 1.40 ERA. "He's one of the top arms in Louisiana," Norris said. "He's a left-hander who is really good. We're very excited to get him and to go into Louisiana and take one of the state's top guys."

A native of Birmingham, Hubbard comes to Alabama after a strong career Oak Mountain High School. He was a 2010 Perfect Game USA Underclassmen Preseason All-American Honorable Mention selection and is also ranked by Perfect Game USA as the No. 16 prospect in the state. The right-handed pitcher also participated in the Alabama Coaches Association Showcase the past two seasons. "He fits what our pitching staff's philosophy is: taller guys who can throw strikes," Norris said. "He's a top arm in the state."

A native of Lake in the Hills, Illinois, Gardeck comes to The Capstone after spending his first year of collegiate baseball at the University of Dayton and last season at Angelina Junior College in Lufkin, Texas. Coming out of high school, he was ranked as the top right-handed pitcher in the state of Illinois by Perfect Game USA. This summer with the Danbury Westerners, Gardeck was ranked as the eighth-best prospect in the New England Collegiate League by Baseball America. Gardeck is also ranked as the No.1 junior college prospect by Perfect Game USA.

"All these guys fit what we're trying to do," Norris said. "They're blue-collar players who can hit for power, can run a little bit, and they really fit our system well. We're very pleased with the class that we have."

SOFTBALL

Alabama Softball Coach Patrick Murphy added three position players and one pitcher. The position players are Chaunsey Bell of Indianapolis, Danielle Richard of Priceville, and Jadyn Spencer of Waterloo, Iowa. The pitcher is Leslie Jury of Anderson, South Carolina.

"We are so excited about the four young ladies who said yes to Alabama," Murphy said. "We are getting four outstanding softball players but more importantly, four great women from good families. The magic of recruiting happens when both sides truly believe in each other. We wanted Leslie, Jadyn, Danielle and Chaunsey and they wanted to come to Alabama."

Bell is coming off a 2010 campaign in which she helped lead Lutheran High School to a state runner-up finish. Bell led the entire state of Indiana with 15 home runs en route to being named a first team all-state, all-county and all-conference selection.

"Chaunsey comes from an athletic family with her sister Chanda being a pitcher at Kentucky," Murphy said. "Chaunsey is a great target to throw to behind the plate and has great power offensively. She did a great job running the show whenever we watched her team this summer. You could see really good leadership skills starting to develop."

Bell was also a Gatorade Player of the Year nominee and garnered ESPN Rise Player of the Week honors. The 5-10 Bell plays her club ball for Indy Dreams and is coming off an ASA Gold Nationals appearance. Chaunsey has two sisters who currently play college softball, as Chanda is a pitcher for Kentucky and Chelsea is an infielder for Marian University.

Jury, who has a potent arm, will come to The Capstone from J.L. Mann High School in Greenville, South Carolina. In 2010, Jury helped leads J.L. Mann to its second consecutive state title and was named the South Carolina Gatorade Player of the Year for the second straight season.

Murphy said, "Leslie has tremendous upside both pitching and hitting. What excites us most about her is that she is nowhere near her top potential. She hit 71 miles per hour on a radar gun this summer and she can still get better."

Jury was also named the High School Sports Report South Carolina's Miss Softball, SCCAWS AAA Player of the Year, all-state and all-region. For travel ball she plays for the Gold Coast Hurricanes where she led the team to a second place finish at ASA Gold Nationals in 2009 and a 9th place finish in 2010. She was named an ESPN Rise second team All-American and participated in the Under Armour All-America Game.

Richard brings her athletic prowess from Priceville High School where she set numerous Alabama high school records. Richard set a single season record in 2010 in hits (85), batting average (.545), and ranked second in the country in the single season annals with 23 home runs. She was named the Alabama Sports Writers Association 4A Player of the Year, Hitter of the Year, all-state, Decatur Daily Player of the Year, and Hartselle Enquirer Player of the Year.

"Danielle has one of the best swings we have seen in a long time," Murphy said. "For a young lady to hit 23 home runs is something special. For her to be 5-2 is unbelievable. She can compete anywhere on the field defensively with a strong arm and good hands."

Richard plays her travel ball for the Huntsville Sharks where she helped lead the team to a 17th place at the ASA A 16U nationals in College Station, Texas. She has also taken her talents overseas where in 2008 she traveled to Europe to play the German and Italian Junior Olympic teams.

Spencer heads to Alabama from Waterloo West High School where she was named the 2010 4A Player of the Year. Spencer has been an all-state selection every year at Waterloo and has added all-conference, all-metro, and team MVP honors.

"Jadyn is probably the best athlete in the state of Iowa right now," Murphy said. "She has been all-state in softball, basketball and track for the past three years. Her mom (Joni) and dad (Marvin) are former collegiate athletes in Iowa so she has some great bloodlines. She, too, has not touched her ceiling for softball. Once she concentrates on one sport, it is going to be fun watching her improve her entire game."

Off the softball field Spencer has excelled on the basketball court and track as well. She has garnered all-state honors in basketball in back-to-back seasons and amassed over 1000 points. On the track she has been a state qualifier in the shot put, 4x100 relays and 100 meters. She holds the school record in the shot put in and sprint medley.

MEN'S GOLF

Alabama Men's Golf Coach Jay Seawell announced the signing of Justin Thomas and Tom Lovelady. "With Tom and Justin we have another class that should keep Alabama golf relevant at the SEC and the NCAA Championship level for a long time," Seawell said. Thomas comes to Alabama from Goshen, Kentucky, as the number one junior golfer in the state of Kentucky and the number seven overall junior in the nation by Golfweek. In 2009, at the age of 16, Thomas became the third-youngest player ever to make a PGA Tour cut, with a tie for 78th at the Wyndham Championship in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Thomas was also one of 12 juniors selected – six boys and six girls – to represent the U.S. at the Junior Ryder Cup in Gleneagles, Scotland, helping lead the USA team to a 13-10 victory. Thomas was also runner-up at the 2010 U.S. Junior Amateur and qualified for match play at the 2010 U.S. Amateur.

"He's one of the top guys in all of the country in the Class of 2011," Seawell said. "He's shown that he's going to be a guy that comes right in and be part of our program and help us a great deal."

Lovelady, who hails from Mountain Brook, will bring his talents to The Capstone as the number three junior golfer in the state of Alabama and number 31 overall junior in the nation by Golfweek. A 2009 Rolex Junior All-America, Lovelady won the West Alabama Classic at Ol' Colony in Tuscaloosa and finished in the top five at the Bradley Johnson Memorial at Greystone Country Club in Birmingham. Lovelady also finished tied for second in the 2009 Footjoy

Invitational for juniors in North Carolina against a field that included many of the top junior players in the nation. This past year he led the local qualifier for the U.S. Junior Amateur, won the Dixie Section Junior PGA Championship as well as the Willow Point Invitational.

"Tom has great skills," Seawell said. "He probably has as many shots on the golf course as any junior that I've ever recruited. He really does like to work the ball. He hits it a long way."

Johanna Tillstrom

Taylor Manning

WOMEN'S GOLF

Alabama Women's Golf Coach Mic Potter obviously knows something about evaluating talent as he has the Crimson Tide ranked number one in the nation. And Potter has added three outstanding players for next year's Bama team.

The 2011-12 season signing class includes Daniela Lendl from Vero Beach, Florida; Johanna Tillström from Täby, Sweden; and Taylor Manning of Brentwood, Tennessee.

Lendl, the daughter of the former world's number one tennis player Ivan Lendl, is ranked 42nd in the class of 2011 by Golfweek and 89th overall in the Golfweek Junior Rankings. Her older sisters, Marika and Isabelle, both play golf at the University of Florida.

Lendl was a first-team All-America on the Future Collegians World Tour in 2008 and a FCWT Faces of the Future selection in 2006. She also was honored with the FCWT Good of the Game Award in 2008 and is a member of the National Honor Society.

"Daniela is a great junior player," Potter said. "I think she is a really talented girl, who has had a lot of competitive experience. She is strong and athletic and obviously has great genes. I expect her to come in and contribute right away."

Tillström is the third Swedish player recruited to tee it up for the Tide during Potter's tenure at The Capstone. She joins current senior Camilla Lennarth and 2009 graduate Helena Blomberg, who both excelled under Potter's tutelage.

Tillström competed for the Swedish National Team at the 2008 European Girls' Team Championships, leading the team to a gold medal as well as a runner-up finish at the 2009 European Girls' Team Championships and a fourth-place finish in 2010. She also played on the European team in the 2009 PING Junior Solheim Cup. Tillström's top individual finish was a fourth place at the 2010 European Girls' Championship and qualifying for the match play at the British Amateur.

Brooke Parker

Diandra Milliner

Kaitlyn Clark

Kayla Williams

"Johanna has great international exposure," Potter said. "She is on the Swedish Junior National Team that has played in the European Girls Championships the past several years and has done very well. Along with talent, she brings an unbelievable work ethic. She is a great student and a great fit all around for our program." Manning is ranked 106th in the class of 2011 by Golfweek. She was the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletics Association 2010 AAA Individual State Champion. Manning also won the 2009 Tennessee Junior Amateur Championship and was named the 2009 Tennessee Golf Association Player of the Year. She is a four-time MVP of the Ravenwood High School golf team and holds the Ravenwood record for low score at 66.

"Taylor is a little bit young as a player, but has tremendous potential and is a very hard worker," Potter said. "That is what we look for in this program, someone that is passionate about golf, is going to work hard to achieve her goals, has high expectations, and is going do what it takes to meet those goals. Taylor definitely fits that mold."

GYMNASTICS

Legendary Alabama Gymnastics Coach Sarah Patterson added four new performers in the early signing period. They are Kayla Williams, Brooke Parker, Diandra Milliner, and Kaitlyn Clark.

"We're very excited about this class and to have them join our program," Patterson said. "They are each very talented and have enjoyed championship success in their careers to this point. Moreover, they have great personalities which I think will capture our fans right away."

The 2009 World Vault Champion, Williams is coached by Mary Lee Tracy at Cincinnati Gymnastics. A member of the United States World Championship Team, the Huntington, West Virginia, native won the vault at the 2009 USA Junior and Senior National Championships as well as the World Championships.. A three-year member of the Region 7 All-Star team, she won the Junior Olympic National all-around, floor exercise, and vault titles in 2009. She is a senior at Huntington High School where she is a member of the National Honor Society.

"It just clicked," Williams said. "I knew I would be surrounded by great people and rich traditions. It was the feeling of being a part of a family within my first hour on campus. It was arriving in Tuscaloosa for the first time, and feeling at home."

A member of the USA National Team, Clark is coached by Trent and Jill Spaulding at Precision Gymnastics. A native of Ontario, California, Clark finished ninth in the all-around at the 2010 USA Senior National Championships. She was 10th in the all-around at the 2009 USA Senior National Championships and took part in the World Championship selection camp that same year. She is a member of the National Honor Society and the California Scholarship Federation at Ontario Christian High School.

"I was looking for a program that was very team oriented and I found that at Alabama," Clark said. "That was really an important factor to me. Of the schools I visited, Alabama was the one where I felt like I was at home. It had everything I was looking for and wanted–great coaches, great teammates and great academics."

A Senior International Elite, Parker is coached by Tatiana Perskaia and Oleksandr Vorobyov at Capital Gymnastics National Training Center. A native of Lorton, Virginia, she finished 13th in the all-around at the 2009 USA Senior National Championships and was ninth on the uneven bars. She is a senior at South County Secondary School.

"The coaches, Sarah and David Patterson, Bryan Raschilla and Dana Duckworth, made a great impression upon me from our first encounter," Parker said. "I respect and honor their achievements in the gym, at The University and in the community. I am blessed to be able to be joining a great gymnastics family. I am super excited to be going to Alabama, not only for the gymnastics but for the great educational programs they have available."

Milliner is coached by Mark Folger, Jennifer O'Bar and Jen Flores at Folger's Gymnastics. The Wichita, Kansas, native won the vault and floor exercise at the 2010 Junior Olympic National Championships. At the 2009 Junior Olympic National Championships she won the vault and was second in the all-around. She is a senior at Maize High School.

"The moment I set foot on campus everyone treated me like I belonged there, like I was already part of that family," Milliner said. "The people and their spirit towards the school and each other pulled me in and I was hooked. At the end of my visit I decided that Alabama was the school for me."

VOLLEYBALL

Although Judy Green was completing her last year as head coach of the Crimson Tide volleyball team, she didn't quit recruiting until the final moment. As a result, the new Bama coach will have three new performers who signed with Alabama. They are Taylor Masterson,

Photos by University of Alabama

Courtney Robison

Emily Zabor

"EMILY ZABOR IS ASSUREDLY GOING TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT IN OUR ALABAMA PROGRAM," MAINZ SAID. "SHE HAS THE TALENT, WORK ETHIC AND LEADERSHIP WE NEED AT ALABAMA. I'M IMPRESSED WITH THE WAY SHE COMPETES. SHE'S TENACIOUS, ENERGETIC AND DILIGENT ON COURT. EMILY HAS AN AWESOME DISPOSITION AS SHE HAS A CONTAGIOUS SPIRIT AND IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT COMPETING."

Courtney Robison and Samantha Skinner.

"My recruiting coordinator, Josh Lauer, has done a tremendous job of putting this class together," Green said. "We identified our 2011 needs, and Josh went out and signed one of the best classes in recent years. He deserves the credit for this class. These three players depict the direction we want our program to be headed in. They are exceptional students, highly competitive volleyball players and most importantly people of great character. They are skilled at their positions and bring another level of athleticism to the program. All three played in their respective state high school championships with Courtney and Taylor winning state titles and Sam's team finishing second. They will be exciting players for our fans to watch next fall and throughout their Alabama careers, but the most impressive final piece they bring together is they all are very proud to be representing The University of Alabama and the volleyball program."

Masterson, a 6-1 middle hitter from Chesterfield, Missouri, led St. Joseph's Academy to the Missouri Class 4A State Championships in 2010 and 2008. She was named to the AVCA Under Armour Girls' High School All-America Volleyball Athlete Watch list for the 2010-11 season and is a two-time all-state selection. Masterson also earned All-Tournament Team honors in 2009. One of the highlights of her career was getting the winning block in a set that went 31-29 against Lees Summit West High School. Masterson played club volleyball for the Rockwook Thunder placing 10th in the open division at the National Championships in Reno, Nevada, this season.

"Taylor is one of the most athletic middles we saw over the last two club seasons," Green said. "She brings a more physical presence to our middle blocking position. She is a dynamic blocker who can take over a match, and her offensive skills continue to develop at a rapid rate. She attended our camp two summers ago, and we were very impressed with what we saw."

Robison joins future Tide teammate Masterson on the AVCA Under Armour Girls' High School All-America Volleyball Athlete Watch list and was all-state. The 5-11 setter from Louisville, Kentucky, guided Assumption High School to a 39-4 record in 2010 en route to winning the state title. She was equally successful on her club team, KIVA, winning AAU National Championships from 2006-10. Robison is also heavily involved off the court as she is a member of the National Honor Society and Beta Club and serves as a class officer.

"Courtney is one of the best setters in the country," Green said. "She has improved tremendously over the past year as evident when she led her KIVA 17-1 team to the AAU National Championship title last June. Her club and high school winning experiences will be vital to the development of next year's Alabama team. She is a winner in all aspects of her life."

Skinner, a native of Birmingham, helped Oak Mountain High School to a runner-up finish in the state championship. The 5-10 hitter earned a spot on the 6A All-Tournament Team following the 2010 season. Skinner competed at AAU Nationals in 2009 as a member of the Birmingham Volleyball Club team. She was also named to the 2009 Alabama Volleyball Coaches 6A all-state second team.

"Sam is one of the most versatile high-level athletes in the 2011 class," Green said. "She can play both outside and in the middle, however I believe she will move to the outside once she gets in the program. She also has the ability to become a six-rotation player as her back row skill set has developed at a very high rate over the past season."

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Alabama Coach Jenny Mainz has announced the signing of Emily Zabor, who will join the Crimson Tide women's tennis team in the fall of 2011.

"Emily Zabor is assuredly going to make a positive impact in our Alabama program," Mainz said. "She has the talent, work ethic and leadership we need at Alabama. I'm impressed with the way she competes. She's tenacious, energetic and diligent on court. Emily has an awesome disposition as she has a contagious spirit and is enthusiastic about competing."

Zabor, a native of Atlanta, has been number one singles for Walton High School for the last two years. She has won three state championships and was named the county Player of the Year last season. Walton High has been a girls' tennis powerhouse in the state of Georgia, winning 133 consecutive dual matches and seven consecutive AAAAA state championships.

In junior competition, Zabor claimed the 2010 Peach State Championship and the 2010 National Open Doubles Title. She trains at the Olde Towne Athletic Club under Jerry Baskin. She is also coached by her father, Rick Zabor, who played collegiate tennis at Michigan State. ■

Photos by University of Alabama

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BY EVAN DANIELS
SCOUT.COM

CLASS ACTS

For the first time in recent years, a majority of the top basketball prospects in the country made early college decisions, opting to sign in the fall period.

With most of the top players off the board, the fall class rankings provide a pretty accurate look at the landscape of the 2011 recruiting class.

Kentucky tops the list with a class that consists of three top-10 prospects and another five-star recruit. The shocker in the 2011 class was the job Steve Lavin did at St. John's. The Red Storm will bring in the most top-100 prospects and have built a strong foundation for the coming years.

Here's a glance at the top 10 recruiting classes.

NO. 1: KENTUCKY

Surprise! For the third year in a row, John Calipari and the Wildcats sit atop the recruiting rankings. This time around, Kentucky has three signees ranked in Scout.com's top six and another ranked among the top 25. The nation's top prospect — Anthony Davis — is the jewel of the Wildcats' class. A 6-foot-9, 200-pound forward, Davis is a versatile prospect who is a terrific shot blocker and rebounder, and also has a unique ability to score. Marquis Teague, the nation's top lead guard, will bring speed and athleticism to the point guard spot. Michael Gilchrist, a 6-7 wing, is a terrific defender who attacks the rim as well as any wing in the 2011 class. Throw in Kyle Wiltjer, a skilled 6-9 post prospect, and the Kentucky class contains a lot of talent from top to bottom.

ANTHONY DAVIS

Kelly Kline

SCOUT TOP50

Pos	Pos Rk	Name	Committed to...
PG	1	Marquis Teague	Kentucky
SG	1	Austin Rivers	Duke
SF	1	Michael Gilchrist	Kentucky
PF	1	Anthony Davis	Kentucky
C	1	Rakeem Christmas	Syracuse
PG	2	Myck Kabongo	Texas
SG	2	Brad Beal	Florida
SF	2	LeBryan Nash	Oklahoma State
PF	2	Quincy Miller	Baylor
PG	3	Josiah Turner	Arizona
SG	3	Wayne Blackshear	Louisville
SF	3	Adonis Thomas	Memphis
PF	3	James McAdoo	North Carolina
PG	4	B.J. Young	Arkansas
SG	4	Kentavious Caldwell	Georgia
SF	4	Branden Dawson	Mich. State
PF	4	Khem Birch	Pittsburgh
PG	5	Quinn Cook	Duke
SG	5	Jabari Brown	Oregon
SF	5	Michael Gbinije	Duke
PF	5	Cody Zeller	Indiana
SG	6	P.J. Hairston	North Carolina
SF	6	Rodney Hood	Mississippi State
PF	6	Kyle Wiltjer	Kentucky
PF	7	Johnny O'Bryant	LSU
C	2	Amir Williams	Ohio State
C	3	Adjehi Baru	Coll. of Charleston
C	4	Mikael Hopkins	Georgetown
C	5	Erik Copes	George Washington
PG	6	Tony Wroten	Washington
C	6	Zach Price	Louisville
PG	7	Shannon Scott	Ohio State
SG	7	Levi Randolph	Alabama
SF	7	Dorian Finney-Smith	Va. Tech
C	7	Marshall Plumlee	Duke
PG	8	Jahii Carson	Arizona State
SG	8	Michael Carter-Williams	Syracuse
SF	8	Jakarr Sampson	St. John's
PF	8	Chane Behanan	Louisville
C	8	Joseph Uchebo	NC State
PG	9	Jamal Branch	Texas A&M
SG	9	Nick Johnson	Arizona
SF	9	Rashad Madden	Arkansas
PF	9	DeAndre Daniels	Undecided
C	9	Nnanna Egwu	Illinois
PG	10	Jabarie Hinds	West Virginia
SG	10	Ben McLemore	Undecided
SF	10	Dezmine Wells	Xavier
PF	10	Angelo Chol	Undecided
C	10	Michael Chandler	Undecided

AUSTIN RIVERS

NO. 2: ST. JOHN'S

After spending the past few years as an ESPN analyst, Lavin took over in 2010 as the head coach at St. John's. It hasn't taken him long to get things going on the recruiting front. His first class consists of six top-100 prospects, a junior-college standout and a three-star recruit. Jakarr Sampson, Sir'Dominic Pointer and Maurice Harkless are the top-rated prospects in the group, and all three play the wing. Sampson is an elite-level athlete who brings a lot of energy, Pointer is a strong, athletic swingman who also brings toughness and grit, and Harkless is a skilled 6-8 forward who can score. Joining them on the wings will be Amir Garrett and D'Angelo Harrison. It's clear Lavin was looking to add scorers with athleticism, and he certainly accomplished that goal.

NO. 3: DUKE

Mike Krzyzewski's success on the court has carried over to success in recruiting. Duke's four-man class of Austin Rivers, Quinn Cook, Michaël Gbinije and Marshall Plumlee should provide plenty of points. Rivers is arguably the top guard in the 2011 class. The son of the Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he has an advanced skill set and ranks among the top scorers in the class, but he'll get plenty of help on the wing from Gbinije, a 6-7 Virginia native. Cook is Duke's third top-25 prospect in the 2011 class and will man the point guard duties when Kyrie Irving leaves for the NBA. Plumlee, who follows older brothers Mason and Miles to Duke, is the third and last of the brothers. At 7-0, he'll provide depth at center.

NO. 4: ARKANSAS

John Pelphrey and his staff at Arkansas did a terrific job of keeping the best in-state players in the class at home. With the Arkansas Wings AAU program loaded with a handful of major prospects, the Razorbacks made them their No. 1 recruiting priority. By the end of the early signing period, Arkansas was able to lock in the Wings' top three players — Ky Madden, Hunter Mickelson and Aaron Ross — as well as one of the top point guards in the country — B.J. Young — and a three-star player in Devonte Abron. Young, Madden and Mickelson each rank among the nation's top 50 prospects.

NO. 5: TEXAS

After wavering on his commitment, Myck Kabongo, Rick Barnes' prized recruit, signed with the Longhorns. Kabongo is the third significant Canadian to jump on board with Texas, after Cory Joseph and Tristan Thompson chose the 'Horns last season. Joining Kabongo, Scout.com's No. 11 prospect, next year are three top-100 prospects. Sheldon McClellan checked in at No. 29, Jonathan Holmes at No. 66 and Julien Lewis at No. 88. Both McClellan and Lewis are high-level scorers who should be able to help the Longhorns quickly. Holmes was a late bloomer, but appears to be improving at just the right time.

NO. 6: OHIO STATE

Thad Matta and his staff have been a force on the recruiting trail the past few years. For the 2010 class, they picked up a pair of top-25 prospects: Jared Sullinger and DeShaun Thomas. This time around, they reeled in four prospects ranked among Scout.com's top 75, plus a three-star big man. Amir Williams and Shannon Scott are their highest-rated recruits. Williams, a 6-9 big man, ranks No. 36 overall and will be a force defensively, while Scott, No. 38, is a pass-first lead guard who will share the point guard responsibilities with current freshman Aaron Craft.

NO. 7: LOUISVILLE

Rick Pitino and Louisville are back in Scout.com's top-10 class rankings after a two-year hiatus. The Cardinals have a great class that consists of top-15 prospect Wayne Blackshear, top-30 recruit Chane Behanan, top-60 prospect Zach Price and three-star combo forward Angel Nunez. Blackshear, a terrific scorer, will get every opportunity to make an impact at the wing spot, as there is playing time available right away. Behanan, MVP of the NBA Camp, should get early playing time as well because of his strong motor and his ability to score on the block.

MYCK KABONGO

P.J. HAIRSTON

NO. 8: NORTH CAROLINA

It shouldn't be a surprise to the see the Tar Heels among the top 10 recruiting classes in the county. This time around, the Heels were limited with scholarships, but they certainly made the most of them, signing a pair of five-star recruits in James McAdoo and P.J. Hairston. McAdoo, a 6-8, 215-pound power forward, is ranked No. 7 overall and is a versatile four man who will provide an immediate impact on the low block. Hairston, the No. 20 recruit in the country, has an elite-level jump shot with range that extends well past the three-point stripe. Throw in preferred walk-on and three-star recruit Jackson Simmons, and the Heels have quite the class.

NO. 9: SYRACUSE

Jim Boeheim and crew had the No. 7 recruiting class for 2010. Fast forward to the 2011 recruiting class, and they are bringing in a similarly rated group. The Orange will bring in only three prospects, but all three rank among the nation's top 60 recruits, including Rakeem Christmas at No. 16. An elite shot blocker, Christmas will provide a strong defensive presence for the Orange. Syracuse's other two recruits — Michael Carter-Williams and Trevor Cooney — will bring quite a bit of scoring to the table. Carter-Williams is a long, wiry scorer who has developed a strong mid-range game, while Cooney is an impressive long-range shooter.

NO. 10: ARIZONA

Since arriving in Tucson, Sean Miller hasn't wasted much time getting on the recruiting trail. With no clear-cut power on the West Coast, Miller and Arizona have been able to sneak into California and reel in some talent. This year, they pulled top-15 recruit and elite-level point guard Josiah Turner. Joining him will be athletic guard Nick Johnson and talented big man Sidiki Johnson, who both rank in the nation's top 100. Turner and Johnson will provide the Wildcats with some much-needed firepower in the backcourt, and both should see action as soon as they step on campus. ■

RECRUITING BY ANDREW BONE

Tide looking for quarterbacks in 2012

PREP PRO

The University of Alabama will have three scholarshipped quarterbacks competing during spring practice. They are redshirt sophomore A.J. McCarron, redshirt freshman Phillip Sims, and true freshman Phillip Ely. The quarterback battle for the number one spot is expected to be between McCarron and Sims, making that competition among the best on any college campus in the country.

McCarron saw playing time in the 2010 season, but Sims is a legitimate threat for the starting job. Sims arrived in January 2010 to compete in spring practice. He was the first five-star quarterback signed by Alabama since Coach Nick Saban's arrival at The Capstone in 2007.

Alabama has taken one quarterback in each of Saban's recruiting classes. The Tide staff picked up a commitment from U.S. Army All-American participant Nick Fanuzzi from the state of Texas in 2007. Fanuzzi later transferred to Rice. The heralded 2008 class featured quarterback Star Jackson from Lake Worth, Florida. Jackson stayed in Tuscaloosa longer than Fanuzzi, but transferred to Georgia State prior to the start of the 2010 season.

Alabama reeled in another top three recruiting class in 2009. McCarron was a top target of the Crimson Tide since his sophomore year at St. Paul's Episcopal in Mobile. He grew up a big Alabama fan and committed over numerous scholarship offers.

Alabama landed a pair of quarterbacks in the 2010 class, but only one was recruited to play the position. Phillip Sims is the state of Virginia's all-time prep passing leader. Blake Sims, from Gainesville, Georgia, played quarterback in high school and was recruited as an athlete. (The multi-talented Blake did see some quarterback duty on the scout team for Bama last fall, but is expected to be a receiver, running back, or defensive back.)

The Alabama coaching staff did not make an early offer to Ely. Last summer, prior to Ely's senior season at Tampa Plant

Ely impressed the coaches during summer camp. He committed to the Tide with other scholarship offers from Arizona State, Clemson, LSU, Michigan State, Ole Miss, South Florida,

Scout.com

Jameis Winston

Scout.com

Zeke Pike

Tennessee, Vanderbilt and Wake Forest. He graduated in December and enrolled at Alabama in January.

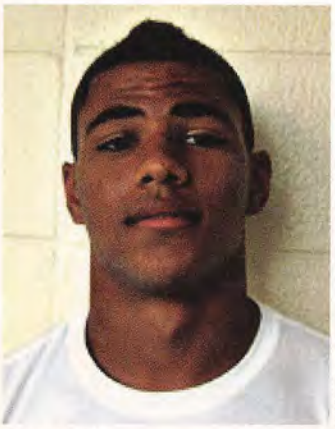
Alabama had been in the mix for several other high profile quarterbacks, but all committed elsewhere. They included Braxton Miller (Ohio State), Jeff Driskel (Florida), Teddy Bridgewater (Miami), Christian LeMay (Georgia), Bubba Starling (Nebraska) and Cody Kessler (USC). Alabama also offered junior college quarterback Zach Mettenberger.

Alabama has taken one true quarterback in every class since 2007, but the signing class of 2012 is expected to have two quarterbacks join the Tide. Several have high interest in the 2009 National Champions.

Scholarships have been extended to National 100 quarterbacks Jameis Winston from Hueytown; Zeke Pike from Ft. Mitchell (Kentucky) Dixie Heights; Matt Davis from Houston (Texas) Klein Forest; Greyson Lambert from Jesup (Georgia) Wayne County; Gunner Kiel from Columbus (Indiana) East; and Connor Brewer from Scottsdale (Arizona) Chaparral.

The coaching staff also has extended offers to Jeremy Liggins from Oxford (Mississippi) Lafayette and Justin Thomas

OSPECTS

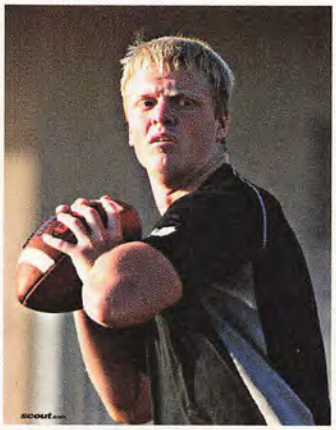


Scout.com

Matt Davis

Scout.com

Greyson Lambert



Scout.com

Gunner Kiel

from Prattville. Thomas has committed to Alabama. He will get a first look at quarterback.

Jameis Winston is the top offensive player in the state of Alabama. The 6-4, 190-pound recruit has collected scholarship offers from Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Miami, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Ohio State, Stanford, and UCLA. Winston favors the Tide. He plans to play football and baseball on the next level. Saban has given the green light on playing both in Tuscaloosa.

"Alabama is my home," said Winston. "One of my favorite coaches is Coach Sunseri (Bama Assistant Sal Sunseri). I love him. I have talked to Alabama about playing baseball. Coach Saban said there was no doubt I could do it. He did it when he was in college."

Winston attended the Tide's final regular season game against Auburn at Bryant-Denny Stadium.

"It was rocking for the Auburn game, and I loved it," he said. "In a game like this, there is not anybody in the stadium who is neutral; either you love Alabama or you love Auburn. It is cool to see because the fans are so into the game and, that makes the atmosphere something special."

Zeke Pike didn't start as a quarterback until his junior season. The 6-5, 225-pound recruit was a star at linebacker his sophomore year, but shined during the spring and summer as a quarterback reeling in scholarship offers from across the country. Pike has more than 30 offers including Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisville, Oklahoma State, Penn State, Tennessee, and Southern Cal. He attended Alabama's summer camp and returned for the Iron Bowl. His father, Mark Pike, played for Georgia Tech and the Buffalo Bills.

"It was wild," Pike said of the game. "Both teams have offered, and I had to put myself on both sides. The atmosphere was unreal. I have never been to a game where it's that loud. I know the rivalry has a lot to do with it, but it was a different atmosphere than anything I have ever been to.

"Alabama is a great school. They are one of the best programs in the country. Every year they have a solid program and are continuing to build. This season didn't turn out as well as they had hoped, but will still go to a good bowl game. Next year they will try to go back to the National Championship. I definitely like Alabama a lot and will give them a good look."

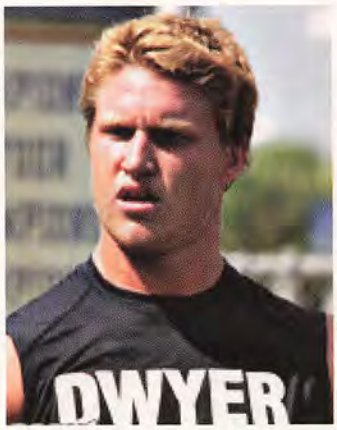
Greyson Lambert is the top signal caller in the Peach State. He was offered first by Clemson followed by Alabama. Georgia has also extended an offer to the National 100 recruit.

"Every time I go up to Alabama I have a great time," said Lambert. "I like all the coaches up there. I feel like I am building a very strong relationship with all of them."

PHOTOS BY SCOUT.COM

"THE ATMOSPHERE WAS AWESOME, AND I HAVE NEVER BEEN TO A GAME LIKE THAT BEFORE. THE PAC-10 IS NICE TOO, BUT I HAVE NOT SEEN ANYTHING THAT COMPARES TO A FULL SEC STADIUM WITH 100,000 FANS IN IT."

–CONNOR BREWER



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Connor Brewer

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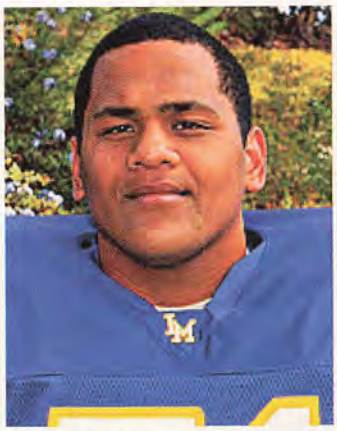
Jeremy Liggins



Scout.com

Justin Thomas

The 6-5, 185-pound prospect was among numerous elite recruits at the Alabama-Auburn game.

"This was my first Iron Bowl, and it definitely lived up to the hype," Lambert said. "It was a great game, the fans there were nuts, and the best part for me was just taking in the Iron Bowl. It is just a great game and a big-time rivalry. I really focused on the fans, coaches, and players during the game to see how all would react and handle all of the different situations."

Gunner Kiel has reeled in several scholarship offers including Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Purdue, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. The 6-4,200-pound recruit attended the Alabama-Georgia State game during the season.

"It was amazing," said Kiel. "It was rocking. The stadium and fans are great. The people and the atmosphere make it a great place to be."

Keil was offered Saban shortly after the trip.

"I was super excited and very thankful that they have interest in me, and I'm very blessed I got the offer," Kiel told Scout.com. "Coach Saban said he watched the film, liked what I was about, and I was a good kid with a lot going for me."

Connor Brewer, four-star quarterback from Scottsdale, was seen in person by the Tide coaching staff before a scholarship was offered. Brewer attended the Alabama-Auburn game, and the 6-3, 190-pound gunslinger received the good news before kickoff. Brewer has also received scholarship offers from Arizona, Arizona State, Arkansas, Nebraska, and Tennessee.

"I met with Coach Saban before the game, and he offered me a scholarship," said Brewer. "I knew Alabama liked me, but I would say I was a little surprised by the offer. He told me they were offering a select few at quarterback, and that I was one of them. He told me he liked how I throw the ball and stuff like that. It was my first time at Alabama, and it was electrifying. The atmosphere was awesome, and I have never been to a game like that before. The Pac-10 is nice too, but I have not seen anything that compares to a full SEC stadium with 100,000 fans in it. I have never seen anything like it. I am really high on Alabama now. They have great facilities, their coaches are first class people, and everything associated with the Alabama program is awesome."

Alabama commitment Justin Thomas is 5-11, 180 pounds and one of the best athletes in the state. Thomas has been clocked at a 4.29-second 40-yard dash, making him one of the fastest players in the country. He is a great leader and does a great job running an offense. Thomas committed to Alabama in November with other scholarship offers coming from Auburn, Florida, LSU, and Miami.

"Alabama has a great program," said Thomas. "It's close to home. If I want to come home it's a short drive. Every time I went there I felt like that's the place I should be. It felt like home."

Thomas can play a number of positions including quarterback, wide receiver, cornerback, kick return, and punt return.

"Playing quarterback is what he wants to do," said Prattville Coach Jamey DuBose. "He'll be our starting quarterback next year. Being so athletic, Justin can play almost anywhere. I can see him being a kick returner with his elusiveness. He could also play defensive back or wide receiver. It's the quarterback position, however, that he has chosen to excel in. He was looking at colleges that were willing to give him the option of playing quarterback when he gets there."

Jeremy Liggins, who is 6-3, 235-pounds, has scholarship offers from Alabama, Ole Miss, and Mississippi State. He attended Alabama's home game this past season against Ole Miss.

"The visit to Alabama was cool," said Liggins. "I liked it over there. I think Alabama is a real good school. I like the history there. I like Coach Saban." ■

Follow Andrew Bone on twitter at http://twitter.com/andrewjbone

Reach Andrew Bone at abone@scout.com

HOT LIST

2011 ALABAMA FOOTBALL PROSPECTS

2011 Alabama Football Prospects as determined by Andrew Bone of 'BAMA Magazine and Scout Media

Buck Allen, 6-1, 210, RB, Tallahassee, Fla. (Lincoln)

Quan Bray, 5-10.5, 175, RB, Hogansville, Ga. (Calloway)

*Shannon Brown, 6-2, 237, MLB, Adel, Ga. (Cook County)

*Brent Calloway, 6-3, 223, 4.5, OLB, Russellville, Ala.

Cornellius Carradine, 6-5, 245, DE, El Dorado (Butler County CC)

*Ha'Sean Clinton-Dix, 6-2, 190, S, Orlando, Fla. (Dr. Phillips)

Jadeveon Clowney, 6-5, 235, DE, Rock Hill, S.C. (South Pointe)

*Daryl Collins, 6-0, 190, 4.5, WR. Gadsden, Ala. (Gadsden City)

Isaiah Crowell, 6-0, 210, 4.43, RB, Columbus, Ga. (Carver)

*Trey DePriest, 6-2, 230, OLB, Springfield, Ohio

*Quinton Dial, 6-5, 310, DT, Scooba, Miss. (East Mississippi Community College)

Xzavier Dickson, 6-4, 236, DE, Griffin, Ga.

Aaron Douglas, 6-6,290, OT, Yuma, Ariz. (Arizona Western)

*Phillip Ely, 6-1, 186, 4.57, QB, Tampa, Fla. (Plant)

*Malcolm Faciane, 6-5, 215, TE, Picayune, Miss (Memorial)

*LaMichael Fanning, 6-7, 270, DT, Auburn, Ala.

George Farmer, 6-2.5, 210, 4.38, WR, Gardena, Calif. (Serra)

Erique Florence, 6-3, 185, 4.5, CB, Valley, Ala.

Curtis Grant, 6-3, 215, OLB, Richmond, Va. (Hermitage)

Jeremy Hill, 6-1, 215, 4.6, RB, Baton Rouge, La. (Redemptorist)

Tim Jernigan, 6-2, 275, DT, Lake City, Fla. (Columbia)

*Chris Jones, 5-11, 170, CB, Adamsville, Ala. (Minor)

*Ryan Kelly, 6-5, 280, OC, West Chester, Ohio (Lakota West)

Cyrus Kouandjio, 6-7, 290, OT, Hyattsville, Md. (Dematha Catholic)

*Issac Luatua, 6-3, 297, OG, La Mirada, Calif.

Curt Maggit, 6-3, 205, DE, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. (Dwyer)

Malcolm Mitchell, 6-1, 180, 4.40, WR, Valdosta, Ga.

Nick O'Leary, 6-4, 230, TE, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. (Dwyer)

Jeoffrey Pagan, 6-4 255 DE Asheville, N.C.

*D.J. Pettway, 6-2.5, 255, DT, Pensacola, Fla. (Pensacola Catholic)

Josh Pinkston, 6-2, 175, WR, Forest, Miss.

Loucheiz Purifoy, 6-1, 170, CB, Pensacola, Fla. (Pine Forest)

Jermauria Rasco, 6-4, 251, DE, Shreveport, La. (Evangel Christian)

Antonio Richardson, 6-6, 285, OT, Nashville, Tenn. (Ensworth)

Jay Rome, 6-5, 237, TE, Valdosta, Ga.

*Marvin Shinn, 6-4, 185, 4.5, WR, Prichard, Ala. (Vigor)

Tony Steward, 6-1, 215, 4.5, MLB, St. Augustine, Fla. (Menendez)

*Vinnie Sunseri, 6-0, 205, OLB, Tuscaloosa, Ala. (Northridge)

Damian Swann, 6-0, 175, 4.5, S, Atlanta, Ga. (Grady)

*Bradley Sylve, 5-10.5, 175, 4.40, Port Sulphur, La. (South Plaquemines)

Robensen Therezie, 5-10, 185, 4.55, S, Miami, Fla. (Jackson)

Xzavier Ward, 6-7, 255, OT, Moultrie, Ga. (Colquitt County)

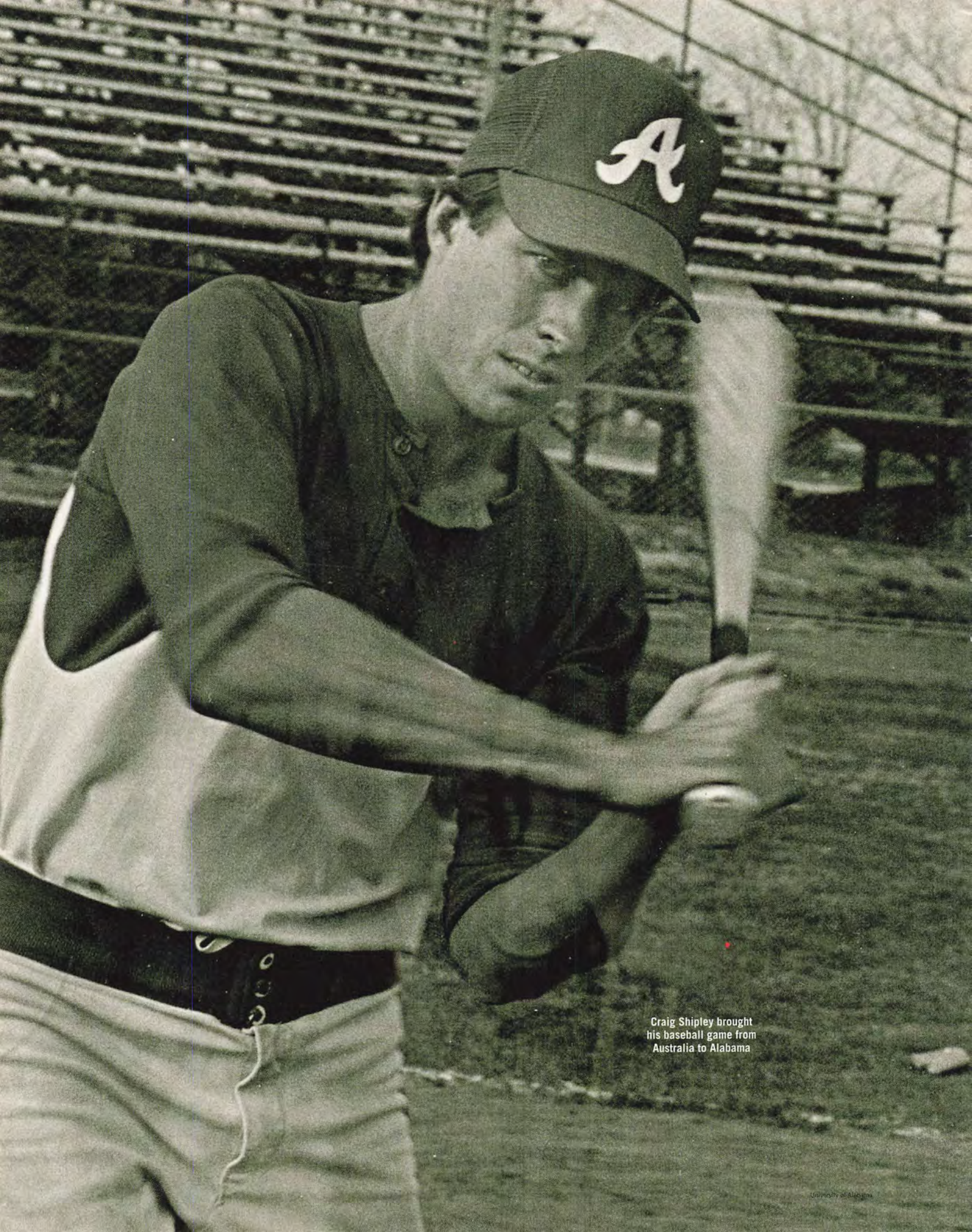
*Jabriel Washington, 5-11, 165, 4.45, CB, Jackson, Tenn. (Trinity Christian Academy)

Ishaq Williams,6-5,225, DE, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Abraham Lincoln)

*Jesse Williams, 6-4.5, 340, DT, Yuma, Ariz. (Arizona Western)

*Danny Woodson Jr., 6-2, 205, 4.5, WR, Mobile, Ala. (LeFlore)

*Committed to Alabama



Craig Shipley brought his baseball game from Australia to Alabama

University of Alabama

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Shipley is world-wide talent hunter

Few people can claim the world as assigned territory, but former Alabama shortstop Craig Shipley does as Senior Vice President/ International Scouting for the Boston Red Sox. Frequent flyer miles, hotels, taxis, and tight itineraries dominate the lifestyle of the globe-trotting baseball executive. "I speak English and bad Spanish; enough to get by," he said. "My phone works all over the world." In fact, he was reached for this article while in a Panamanian taxi. The road is a constant Shipley companion over a couple hundred days per year.

The modern version of baseball may have originated in America, but the influx of foreign talent on Major League teams has flavored the game. According to the commissioner's office, 231 players on 2010 opening day rosters and disabled lists were born outside the United States. Individuals from 14 countries and territories represent 27.7 per cent of the aggregate. Thus, Shipley gallivants across continents.

One of the blockbuster deals he engineered involved the acquisition of Japan's superstar pitcher, Daisuke Matsuzaka, aka Dice-K. The intense negotiations proved productive. "Fundamentally it is simple, but when you break it down it's a very intricate process," said Shipley. "It pretty much boiled down to the highest bidder wins the right to negotiate." The astounding figure of over $51 million was the winning bid allowing the Boston Red Sox to negotiate a player contract under the Japan Nippon Professional Baseball posting system. Granted 30 days to reach an agreement with Matsuzaka in November 2006, the successful figure was a $52 million dollar contract with incentives up to $60 million.

Identifying talent is always a subjective exercise but one common thread persists beyond American soil. "Tools are tools," Shipley said. "It doesn't matter where you come from. If you have Major League tools you have a chance to play in the big leagues."

Distinguishing worthy candidates may not prove as arduous as enticing a signature on a contract. "The most difficult part is signing the player because you are working in a market that is truly free," Shipley said. "Any team can sign the player. Numerous factors can go into any deal, any negotiation."

Although external factors can be an impediment, one constant looms large. "The bottom line is does the player have tools and do those tools project. That said it is very, very difficult because you're dealing in a market that the majority of the players you evaluate are 15, 16, 17 years old. You're looking at high school sophomores, juniors so usually when you start they are freshmen." Observation of a prospect may occur over an extended period of time before he is deemed legitimate. Occasionally an open tryout will produce a surprise. "A lot of times you can find players with tools that are older–18, 19 or 20 years old–who have not been signed."

Baseball nuances exist in every country. "Asia is very, very disciplined and strict," he said. "The players are all taught the same way. Cuba, you don't get the opportunity to sign a lot of players because they have to defect. Cuba plays a much more free style type of game."

Criag Shipley

University of Alabama

Procuring talent in foreign countries in many ways resembles the college recruiting scenario. A key contact is a crucial bridge to successfully navigating the road to inking a prospect. Shipley said, "Latin America, specifically the Dominican Republic, has changed dramatically in the last ten years from a country that all they did was play baseball to a country that has gone through a period to where all they do is practice baseball because the players are controlled by buscons. They are controlled by representatives (mostly street agents) from the time they are 13 or 14 years old."

Venezuela and Panama are still countries not encumbered with as many protective figures running interference in the evaluation process. "Every country has its own difficulty in trying to acquire players," Shipley noted. As recently as less than a decade ago, geographic markets were untapped. "International baseball is very heavily scouted," Shipley said. "There is a much greater presence of American teams worldwide today than there was even five years ago. All parts of the world play baseball."

The game has made significant improvement across the continents. "You'd be surprised how organized baseball is in certain countries in Europe, specifically Holland, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic," Shipley said. "They are a lot more advanced than

people would imagine." Introduced in many cases by American service men, baseball has become very popular.

Born just outside Sydney, Australia, Shipley gravitated to America's pastime due to his father. "I started playing when I was six years old," he said. "It was a natural progression because it was a sport he liked to play. I was always around it."

Although introduced to the country in the 1850s by American gold miners, the game was far from popular in the Commonwealth of Australia. Opportunities in high school were non-existent, but the lack of a structured prep team did not deter him. His only option was to compete with a local team. Games and practices were limited to once per week usually.

He arrived at The Capstone after being seen by Alabama Assistant Roger Smith at a Georgia Southern baseball camp. The three-year lettermen (1982-84) homered his first at bat against South Alabama in February of 1982. He was a member of the 1983 Tide team that won the Southeastern Conference championship and was College World Series runner-up, defeated by the Roger Clemens led Texas Longhorns, 4-3, in the deciding game.

Craig Shipley is Red Sox executive

University of Alabama

Shipley said, "Obviously going to the College World Series was a great memory and just the overall experience of college baseball too. For me, college baseball was the only opportunity (to advance professionally) because when I came out of Australia nobody scouted my country. You have to make your own opportunity. I was just very appreciative that Roger Smith gave me a chance to play. It was a fun time. It was an experience that I never thought I would have an opportunity to pursue."

Australia is a country founded with a pioneering spirit but dreams of professional baseball were far removed from a young boy separated by more than just geography. "When I was a kid there was no one who had ever played in the big leagues," he said. "It was not a goal that seemed attainable or something you would aspire to, so my best opportunity was to try and go to college."

A telling moment in Shipley's Alabama career came in an exhibition game when the 6-1, 175-pound right-hand hitting shortstop slammed an RBI double to tie the game at 7-7 against the New York Yankees in Sewell-Thomas Stadium. And as his college career progressed, he saw that his plan to go back to Australia following his time at The Capstone might change.

"I thought I would play in college and go home," he said. "But then I had the opportunity to sign. Once I was in professional baseball, I thought I had a chance to get to the big leagues."

Shipley is recognized as the first Australian in the modern era to earn a roster spot on a Major League Baseball team. Signed as an amateur free agent in 1984, he debuted with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1986. The 11-year veteran infielder also suited up with the New York Mets, San Diego Padres, Houston Astros, and the Anaheim Angels.

"In hindsight looking back where I came from and how I got there it was very difficult," he said. "I'm proud of the fact I was able to do it."

Although the climb was steep and personally gratifying, Shipley's deed was not celebrated in the homeland. "Baseball is not really a big deal in Australia. It's a minor sport," said Shipley who finished with a .271 career MLB batting average.

Shipley began a baseball operations career with the Montreal Expos serving as a minor league infield and base-running coordinator in 2000. He yearned to be in a position inside the decision making loop which led to a two-year stint as a professional scout with the San Diego Padres. Shipley was hired by the Boston Red Sox in December 2002 serving as a Special Assistant to the General Manager/Player Development and International Scouting. Named a Vice President in 2006, he was promoted to his current position of Senior Vice President/International Scouting prior to the 2009 season.

Several mentors have been key figures for the shrewd talent evaluator. Among them are former general managers, Joe McIlvaine (Mets), Bill Lajoie (Tigers) along with current Arizona Diamondbacks General Manager Kevin Towers. "Those are three guys that immediately come to mind that I have tremendous respect for and I've learned a lot from," Shipley said.

The novice sought and received a forthright directive from Towers the first person to hire him as a scout. Shipley said, "'K.T., what do I do?' He said, 'Go to the game and watch.' At the time it seemed very simplistic and somewhat confusing but when I look back it was very good advice. Go to the game and figure out how you think and why you think certain ways about players. In doing that I also reached out to guys who were in the ballparks I was in trying to learn from them."

Florida is the stateside home base for the father of two daughters, 23 and 14 years old. Shipley oversees all facets of the 16-person department including scouting, administration, budgets and negotiations. "I pretty much exclusively allow our scouts in those countries to negotiate the contract but I give them the parameters of the deal," he said.

A discerning eye is an attribute developed over time. "A really good scout can see and project and have a vision what the player looks like now and what he will be like in five to 10 years. It is a very difficult thing to evaluate players."

Although a multitude of prospects are appraised, few are signed. Twenty-one players inked a contract with the Boston Red Sox last year world wide. Baseball breathes statistics and scouting is not excluded from the numerical scrutiny. "The ultimate measure is what percentage gets to the big leagues," Shipley said. "We are very picky. I've refined our system over the years. We're looking for certain things and certain types of players."

Over a quarter century ago, the native Australian ventured thousands of miles from the Southern Hemisphere across the oceans to America in hopes of pursuing the game he loved. Alabama was the podium to project his talents. He far exceeded the modest dream managing to reach the highest level of success on the diamond, Major League Baseball. Ironically, now the roles are reversed. He is the designated authority sifting through the legion of young men in hopes of finding the next Craig Shipley living beyond the United States borders possessing the talent and intangibles capable of making a name in professional baseball. ■

'BAMA SCORECARD

Notebooking Crimson Tide Sports

NUMBER ONE IN FIELDS

It doesn't necessarily take a long time to get to number one. During fall softball work, The University of Alabama dedicated the Alabama softball complex, which is now the John and Ann Rhoads Softball Complex. A few weeks later the National Fastpitch Coaches Association along with Stabilizer Solutions, its official playing surface sponsor, announced the 2010 Stabilizer Solutions/NFCA Field Maintenance awards this week. Alabama's John and Ann Rhoads Softball Complex was named the top Division I softball field in the nation.

"Since Rhoads Stadium was built in 2000, we have always tried to improve at least one thing each year at the facility," Coach Patrick Murphy said. "This award is a culmination of all those different amenities coming together into one great facility. We are so thankful to our grounds crew and our fans for making Alabama the best place to watch college softball in the country."

The coaching staff accepted the award on behalf of the UA grounds crew at the NFCA Convention. The 2010 crew was comprised of Scott Urbantke, Chris Hildreth, Terry Cook, Ronnie Browning, Parker Patrick, Jamie Blakney and Tim Nix and softball managers Matt Currie, Jordan Burson, Steven Shaw, and Chandler Whidden.

A GOOD CARD

Former University of Alabama All-America Michael Thompson earned his PGA Tour Card and full playing privileges on the PGA Tour in 2011 after finishing tied for 16th place at the PGA Tour Qualifying School in Winter Garden, Florida, in December.

Thompson finished the 108-hole event with an 11-under par 418 (73-72-69-65-69-70), earning $25,000 in the process. A total of 166 golfers teed it up over six days at Orange County National's 7,493 par-72 Crooked Cat Course and 7,223 par-71 Panther Lake Course with the top 25 and ties earning their 2011 PGA Tour cards.

Thompson's final round at Crooked Cat featured an eagle on the par-5 17th hole, ultimately propelling him from a tie for 27th place into a tie for 16th place at the very end of the tournament.

After opening with a 2-over par 73 on the Panther Lake Course, Thompson followed that up with rounds of even-par 72 and 3-under par 69 at Crooked Cat. A six-under par 65 in round four at Panther Lake rocketed Thompson up the leaderboard and put him in a tie for 27th heading into the final two rounds.

Thompson followed up his stellar fourth round 65 with a 2-under par 69 at Panther Lake in Round 5 that put him in a tie for 22nd going into Monday's pressure-packed finale.

Thompson was named 2010 Hooters Tour Player of the Year after finishing the season with six top-10 finishes, four top-5 showings and his first win on tour at the NGA Hooters Tour Michelob Ultra Classic at the Auburn University Club. Thompson earned $92,853 in winnings and accumulated tour-leading 3865 points.

GOOD SHOWING

The Alabama men's cross country team finished 11th in the nation at this year's NCAA Championships on the LaVern Gibson Championship course in Terre Haute, Indiana. Individually, Julius Bor earned All-America honors for the Crimson Tide with his 35th-place finish in the 10-kilometer race.

The team's 11th-place finish is the fifth highest in the program's history as the team fell just one spot shy of recording its fourth straight top-10 finish. The Tide was edged out of 10th by nine points by Southeastern Conference Champion Arkansas while Oklahoma State won its second consecutive team title.

"I was very pleased with our effort," Bama Coach Joe Walker said. "We were aggressive early and drifted a little in the middle, but each guy closed well at the line."

Running in less than ideal conditions with sustained wind gusts over 25 miles per hour, Bor was 25th in the 246-runner field, crossing the line in 30:26.60. Carison Kemei finished 10 seconds behind in 46th while veteran Moses Kiptoo was 68th with a time of 30:39.80.

"I'm very proud of where this team has come in the last three weeks," Walker added. "To come from a national ranking of 27 at one point and finish 11th in the country is a solid performance. Our goal of four straight years in the top 10 eluded us by a very slight margin, but overall I'm happy with this effort today and proud of the guys in Crimson."

Rounding out that effort was Joel Rop in 98th with a time of 31:08.90 followed by Andrew Kirwa in 160th at 31:42.00. Liberty's Sam Chelenga won the individual title for the second straight year with a time of 29:22.20.

Since 2005, the Tide has appeared in six straight NCAA Championship with an average finish of 12th and five top-20 finishes including a program best third-place finish in 2009.

Prior to the national meet, the Crimson Tide men's team dominated the field at the NCAA South Region Championships en route to its fourth straight South Region title and a guaranteed berth in the NCAA Championship field.

The Crimson Tide had its five scorers all finish in the top 13 of the field with Carison Kemei and Julius Bor finishing second and third, respectively, on the 10-kilometer course at Hoover's Veterans Park. As a team, the Tide had 30 points to win the event by 25 points with all five scorers earning All-Region honors.

ELITE 88

Alabama men's cross country student-athlete Nathan Corder has been honored with the NCAA's prestigious Elite 88 award, given to the student-athlete with the highest cumulative grade-point average participating in the finals for each of the NCAA's 88 championships. He is a junior majoring in mathematics.

"This is a tremendous honor for our program to have the student-athlete with the highest GPA at the NCAA Championships and it goes to a well-deserved recipient," Coach Joe Walker said. "Our program is about creating the entire college experience and we set out with the goal of succeeding in the classroom and athletically."

Corder boasts a perfect 4.00 grade-point average in his course work and was honored last spring as an ESPN the Magazine CoSIDA Academic All-American.

"I wanted to go to a school I where I could succeed academically and run as well if I had the opportunity," Corder said. "At Alabama I am able to compete nationally in both athletics and academics."

Corder is the third UA student-athlete to earn the honor since it was created in the fall of 2009. Gymnast Kassi Price won the award last winter while women's golfer Brooke Pancake was honored in the spring. Alabama is one of just five Division I universities to have multiple student-athletes win the award joining Stanford (5), North Carolina (3), Baylor (3) and Nebraska (2).

FAST TIMES

The Alabama swimming and diving team had a nice weekend at the Tennessee Invitational. The meet included Bama having a school record, 13 swims that rank in the Crimson Tide's all-time top-10, and 18 individual and relay wins.

The Alabama men also came away with the team win, score 1191 points, more than 200 better than second place Virginia Tech and third place Tennessee. The Tide women finished fourth with 745 points. Alabama's men are now 5-0 overall and 4-0 in Southeastern Conference competition with wins over Auburn, LSU, Tennessee and Kentucky.

The Tide men won all five relays while in Knoxville, including taking first and second in the 800 freestyle relay as well as the 200 medley relay.

Four men jumped on to Alabama's all-time top-10 lists, including freshman Vlad Caciuc who is now eighth in the 50 freestyle after posting a 20.24; freshman Alex Coci, who is seventh in the 100 butterfly after touching the wall at 48.31; freshman Devan Terry, who is ninth in the 200 individual medley with a 1:50.15; and freshman Hunter Hinson, who is ninth in the 400 IM with a 3:55.28.

Terry won three individual events, including the 100 and 200 breaststrokes as well as the 200 IM, giving him the most Tide wins on the weekend. All three of his wins came with career-best times.

Senior Catalin Cosma won the 500 and 1650 freestyles and ranks in the nation's top-10 in the 500, 1000 and 1650 freestyles after his distance domination in Knoxville.

On the women's side of the slate, senior Kate Shannon Gray broke the Alan Jones Aquatic Center records in the 200 and 400 IM as well as bettering her own school mark in the 200 IM. She also posted career-best times in the 100 and 200 breaststroke, where she is now ranked seventh and fourth all-time for the Tide, respectively.

There are three rookies who joined Gray on the UA all-time top-10, including Kristel Vourna, who is third in the 50 freestyle at 22.92, fourth in the 100 freestyles with a 50.19 and fifth in the 100 butterfly after touching the wall at 53.82; Marissa Dressel, who is eighth in the 500 freestyle with a 4:54.12; and Lauren Piper, who is fourth in the 100 backstroke with a 55.21 and the 200 backstroke with a 1:59.71.

ALL-REGION

Alabama junior goalkeeper Justine Bernier (Oakville, Ontario, Canada) was named to the All-South Region first-team. Bernier becomes just the second Crimson Tide soccer player named to the first team in school history.

"Justine has earned the respect of her peers and opposing coaches during her entire career at Alabama," Coach Todd Bramble said. "We are fortunate to have her another year. While she is truly a difference maker in our program, it is her humble approach and strong work ethic that will ensure she will continue to develop even further while she is at Alabama."

Bernier earns the honor on the heels of a 2010 campaign in which she garnered Southeastern Conference first-team accolades. The goalkeeper also becomes the first Alabama all-region selection since 1998.

The junior broke the Alabama all-time shutout and save record by totaling five clean sheets and 77 saves. She sported a 1.09 goals against average and an .828 save percentage. During conference play she tallied three shutouts and made 63 stops.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The Alabama soccer team was recognized by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America as the Crimson Tide was named to the College Team Academic Award list. To be eligible a team must have a cumulative grade point average above 3.0 for the 2009-10 academic year.

"The first goal we set for our team every semester involves academic achievement," Alabama head coach Todd Bramble said. "I am proud of the players and happy that the effort they put forth in the classroom can be validated with this award. We will expect to see The University of Alabama's name on this list for many years to come."

Alabama had 15 players earn academic honors after the 2009 season, including 12 members of the Southeastern Conference Academic Honor Roll and three on the SEC Freshman Honor Roll. The Crimson Tide finished the 2010 campaign with an 8-8-2 overall record and a 3-6-2 mark in SEC play. Junior goalkeeper Justine Bernier earned All-SEC first-team honors while senior Victoria Frederick was named to the second team. Molly Atherton earned All-SEC freshman team accolades.

Senior Brooke Rogers was named to the CoSIDA Academic All-District team and was named to the SEC Community Service Team for the second straight season.

LAST MATCH

The Alabama volleyball team sent out its four seniors and head coach in grand fashion, defeating rival Mississippi State 3-1 (25-14, 29-27, 21-25, 25-13) in the final match of the year and in what will be the final match at the CAVE in Coleman Coliseum. Next year Bama will play its matches in refurbished Foster Auditorium.

It was the last match for the Tide with Judy Green as head coach. The popular coach announced her retirement from Alabama prior to the season. (Following the season, Green's retirement ended quickly as she was named new head coach at Birmingham Southern.)

Green was at the helm of her last match at Alabama and seniors Mary Catherine Aune, Calli Johnson, Alyssa Meuth and Kayla Schmidt wrapped up their Alabama careers. ■

2011 ALABAMA
WINTER SPORTS SCHEDULE

MEN'S BASKETBALL

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
Nov. 2	Talladega (exh)	TBA
Nov. 8	UAH (exh)	TBA
Nov. 12	Florida A&M	TBA
Nov. 15	Troy	TBA
	Paradise Jam, Virgin Islands	
Nov. 19	Seton Hall	7:30
Nov. 20	Iowa or Xavier	5:00 or 7:30
Nov. 22	TBA	TBA
Nov. 27	Alabama A&M	TBA
Dec. 1	South Alabama	TBA
Dec. 4	@ Purdue	2:30
Dec. 11	@ Providence	1:00
Dec. 15	Southeastern Louisiana	TBA
Dec. 28	Pepperdine	8:00
Jan. 3	Toledo	TBA
Jan. 8	@ Mississippi State	3:00
Jan. 12	South Carolina	8:00
Jan. 15	@ Arkansas	12:30
Jan. 18	Kentucky	8:00
Jan. 22	@ Auburn	5:00
Jan. 29	LSU	7:00
Feb. 2	Mississippi State	7:00
Feb. 5	@ Tennessee	4:00
Feb. 10	@ Vanderbilt	8:00
Feb. 12	Ole Miss	3:00
Feb. 17	@ LSU	8:00
Feb. 19	Arkansas	6:00
Feb. 23	Auburn	7:00
Feb. 26	@ Ole Miss	3:00
March 1	@ Florida	6:00
March 5	Georgia	12:30
March 10-	SEC Tournament	
March 13	@ Georgia Dome, Atlanta	

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
Nov. 6	UAH (exh)	2:00
Nov. 12	Tennessee State	5:00
Nov. 14	Central Arkansas	2:00
Nov. 17	North Carolina St	6:00
Nov. 19	@ Georgia Southern	6:00
Nov. 23	McNeese State	6:00
	Junkanoo Jam @ Freeport, Bahamas	
Nov. 26	FSU	7:00
Nov. 27	Arizona State	
	or Providence	4:45 or 7:00
Dec. 1	Alabama State	5:00
Dec. 4	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	2:00
Dec. 12	@ Kansas	2:00
Dec. 18	Belmont	2:00
Dec. 20	Alabama A&M	11:30
Dec. 28	@ Southern Miss	7:00
Jan.2	Auburn	2:00
Jan. 6	@ Tenessee	6:00
Jan. 9	@ LSU	2:00
Jan. 13	Vanderbilt	6:00
Jan. 16	Arkansas	2:00
Jan. 20	Georgia	8:00
Jan. 23	@ South Carolina	1:00
Jan. 27	@ Florida	6:00
Jan. 30	Kentucky	2:00
Feb. 3	@ Mississippi State	7:00
Feb. 6	@ Georgia	1:00
Feb. 13	Florida	1:00
Feb. 17	@ Auburn	6:00
Feb. 20	Ole Miss	2:00
Feb. 24	Mississippi State	6:00
Feb. 27	@ Arkansas	2:00
March 3-6	SEC Tournament	
	@ Nashville	

GYMNASTICS

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
Jan. 7	Penn State	7:30
Jan.14	@ Arkansas	7:00
Jan. 21	@ Boise State	7:30
	Metroplex Challenge	
Jan. 29	LSU, Nebraska,	
	Missouri @ Fort Worth	
Feb. 4	@ Florida	6:00
Feb. 11	Auburn	7:30
Feb. 18	Kentucky	7:30
Feb. 25	@ Georgia	6:30
March 4	@ Michigan	6:00
March 11	LSU	7:30
March 19	SEC Championships	
	@ Birmingham	
April 2	NCAA Regionals	
April 15-	NCAA Championships	
April 17	@ Cleveland	

SWIMMING & DIVING

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
Oct. 9	Auburn	1:00
Oct. 23	LSU	1:00
Nov. 18-20	@ UT Invitational	
Dec. 2-4	@ USA Short Course	
	Columbus, Ohio	
Dec. 16-18	@ LSU Diving Classic	
Jan. 15	@ Kentucky	TBA
Jan. 22	Florida State	TBA
Jan. 29	South Carolina &	
	Georgia @ Columbia	TBA
Feb. 11-13	SEC Diving @ Gainesville	
Feb. 16-19	SEC Swimming @ Gainesville	
Feb. 26	@ Georgia Invite	
March 5-6	@ Auburn Invite	
March 11-13	NCAA Zone Diving	
March 17-	Women's NCAA	
March 19	@ Austin, Texas	
March 24-	Men's NCAA	
March 26	@ Minneapolis	

*Times central and subject to change

2011 ALABAMA
SPRING SPORTS SCHEDULE

BASEBALL

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
Feb. 18	Alcorn St	6:05
Feb. 19	Alcorn St	2:05
Feb. 20	Alcorn St	1:05
Feb. 22	Alabama St	3:05
South Alabama Tourney @ Mobile		
Feb. 25	SE Louisiana	1:00
Feb. 26	South Alabama	1:00
Feb. 27	UCF	11:00
March 2	Southern Miss	6:05
March 4	NW State	6:05
March 5	NW State	2:05
March 6	NW State	1:05
March 8	Troy	6:05
March 9	Georgia @ Gwinnett	6:00
March 11	Eastern Illinois	6:05
March 12	Eastern Illinois	2:05
March 13	Eastern Illinois	1:05
March 15	Auburn @ Montgomery	7:00
March 18	@ Ole Miss	6:30
March 19	@ Ole Miss	1:30
March 20	@ Ole Miss	1:30
March 22	UAB	6:05
March 23	Jacksonville St	6:05
March 25	Kentucky	6:35
March 26	Kentucky	2:05
March 27	Kentucky	1:05
March 29	UAB @ Hoover	6:05
March 30	South Alabama	6:05
April 1	Arkansas	6:35
April 2	Arkansas	2:05
April 3	Arkansas	1:05
April 5	Samford	6:05
April 8	@ Vanderbilt	6:00
April 9	@ Vanderbilt	2:00
April 10	@ Vanderbilt	1:00
April 12	Mississippi Valley	6:05
April 13	Mississippi Valley	3:05
April 14	Tennessee	6:35
April 15	Tennessee	6:35
April 16	Tennessee	2:05
April 19	@ Samford	6:00
April 22	@ Florida	7:00
April 23	@ Florida	7:00
April 24	@ Florida	1:00
April 26	@ Southern Miss	6:00
April 29	@ Mississippi State	6:30
April 30	@ Mississippi State	2:00
May 1	@ Mississippi State	1:30
May 6	LSU	6:35
May 7	LSU	6:35
May 8	LSU	1:05
May 13	@ Auburn	6:00
May 14	@ Auburn	3:00
May 15	@ Auburn	1:00
May 19	South Carolina	6:35
May 20	South Carolina	6:35
May 21	South Carolina	1:05

SOFTBALL

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
All-Alabama Classic @ Vestavia Hills		
Feb. 11	Samford	6:00
Feb. 12	Alabama A&M	1:30
Feb. 12	Jacksonville St	4:00
Feb. 13	South Alabama	11:00
Feb. 13	Troy	1:30
Bama Bash		
Feb. 18	Louisville	4:00
Feb. 18	Texas-San Antonio	6:00
Feb. 19	Syracuse	1:00
Feb. 19	TBD	4:00
Feb. 20	TBD	1:00
Feb. 22	@ UAB	6:00
USF Tourney @ Tampa		
Feb. 25	Western Michigan	12:30
Feb. 25	Central Connecticut	4:00
Feb. 26	Missouri	12:30
Feb. 26	Illinois State	2:45
Feb. 27	USF	11:45
ESPN Rise Tourney @ Lake Buena Vista, Fla.		
March 4	Fordham	10:00
March 4	Louisiana Lafayette	12:30
March 5	Notre Dame	10:00
March 5	Oregon	3:00
March 6	Virginia	10:30
March 9	@ Georgia Tech	6:00
Easton SEC/ACC Challenge		
March 11	North Carolina	6:00
March 12	Florida State	1:30
March 12	North Carolina	4:00
March 13	Florida State	1:30
March 16	Auburn (2)	5:00
March 18	Georgia	6:30
March 19	Georgia	1:30
March 20	Georgia	1:30
March 22	@ Tennessee (2)	4:00
March 25	Arkansas	6:30
March 26	Arkansas	1:30
March 27	Arkansas	1:30
March 31	@ College of Charleston	6:00
April 1	@ South Carolina	6:30
April 2	@ South Carolina	1:00
April 3	@ South Carolina	1:00
April 8	@ LSU	6:30
April 9-10	@ LSU	1:00
April 12	@ Troy	6:00
April 15	Mississippi St	6:30
April 16-17	Mississippi St	1:30
April 22	@ Florida	6:30
April 23-24	@ Florida	1:00
April 29	Kentucky	6:30
April 30	Kentucky	1:30
May 1	Kentucky	1:30
May 6	@ Ole Miss	6:30
May 7-8	@ Ole Miss	1:00

MEN'S TENNIS

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
JAN. 13	SEC INDOORS @ KNOXVILLE	
JAN. 20	USTA @ BOCA RATON, FLA.	
ITA KICKOFF @ AUSTIN, TEXAS		
JAN. 29	RICE	10:00
JAN. 30	TEXAS/HAWAII	TBA
FEB. 2	TROY	10:00
FEB. 5	FURMAN	3:00
FEB. 11	@ TCU	2:00
FEB. 12	@ SMU	12:00
FEB. 17-20	ITA NATIONAL INDOOR @ SEATTLE	
FEB. 25-27	BLUE-GRAY @ MONTGOMERY	
MARCH 4	@ TENNESSEE	1:00
MARCH 6	@ GEORGIA	1:00
MARCH 11	FLORIDA	2:00
MARCH 13	SOUTH CAROLINA	1:00
MARCH 20	@ KENTUCKY	1:00
MARCH 27	VANDERBILT	1:00
APRIL 1	@ ARKANSAS	1:00
APRIL 3	@ LSU	1:00
APRIL 8	OLE MISS	3:00
APRIL 10	MISSISSIPPI ST	1:00
APRIL 13	UAB	5:00
APRIL 16	@ AUBURN	5:00
APRIL 21-24	SEC CHAMPIONSHIPS @ GAINESVILLE	
MAY 13-15	NCAA PRELIMS	
MAY 19	NCAA @ PALO ALTO, CALIF.	

MEN'S GOLF

DATE	OPP.
FEB. 20-22	PUERTO RICO CLASSIC @ RIO GRANDE, P.R.
MAR. 7-8	CLEVELAND INTERCOLL. @ AIKEN, S.C.
MAR. 20-22	CALLAWAY COLLEGIATE @ GREENSBORO, GA.
MAR. 27-29	LINGER LONGER INVITE @ GREENSBORO, GA.
APRIL 2-3	AUGUSTA STATE INVITE @ AUGUSTA, GA.
APRIL 15-17	SEC CHAMPIONSHIPS @ SEA ISLAND, GA.
APRIL 19-21	NCAA REGIONALS
MAY 31-JUNE 5	NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS @ OKLAHOMA STATE

WOMEN'S TENNIS

DATE	OPP.	TIME*
JAN. 15-17	FSU QUAD @ TALLAHASSEE	
ITA @ WACO, TEXAS		
JAN. 28	BAYLOR	TBA
JAN. 29	RICE/OKLA. STATE	TBA
FEB. 5	TEXAS TECH @ NEW ORLEANS	12:00
FEB. 6	@ TULANE	12:00
FEB. 12	UCF	1:00
FEB. 13	UT-CHATTANOOGA	1:00
FEB. 18	ITA NATIONAL INDOOR @ CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.	
FEB. 25-27	BLUE-GRAY @ MONTGOMERY	
MARCH 4	TENNESSEE	3:00
MARCH 6	GEORGIA	1:00
MARCH 11	@ FLORIDA	5:00
MARCH 13	@ SOUTH CAROLINA	1:00
MARCH 25	KENTUCKY	3:00
MARCH 27	@ VANDERBILT	12:00
APRIL 1	ARKANSAS	3:00
APRIL 3	LSU	1:00
APRIL 8	@OLE MISS	3:00
APRIL 10	@ MISSISSIPPI ST	1:00
APRIL 16	AUBURN	5:00
APRIL 21-24	SEC CHAMPIONSHIPS @ KNOXVILLE	
MAY 13-14	NCAA PRELIMS	
MAY 20	NCAA @ PALO ALTO, CALIF.	

WOMEN'S GOLF

DATE	OPP.
FEB. 13-15	LADY PUERTO RICO CLASSIC @ RIO GRANDE, P.R.
FEB. 27-MAR.1	SUGAR BOWL INTERCOLLEGIATE @ NEW ORLEANS
MARCH 11-13	LSU CLASSIC @ BATON ROUGE
APRIL 1-3	LIZ MURPHEY COLLEGIATE @ ATHENS, GA.
APRIL 15-17	SEC CHAMPIONSHIPS @ AUBURN
MAY 5-7	NCAA REGIONALS
MAY 17-20	NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS @ TEXAS A&M

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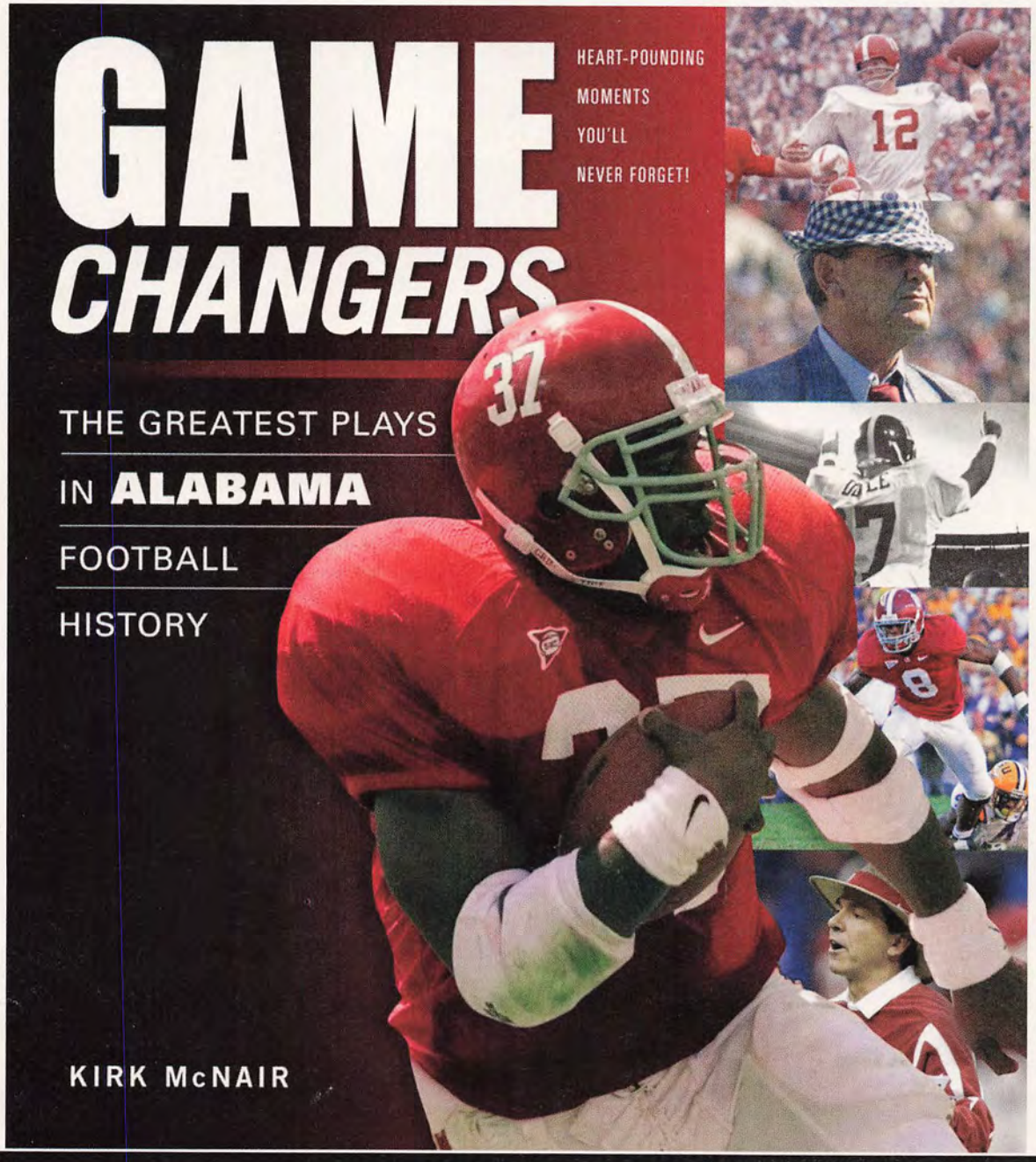
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